A Modern Buccaneer

Rolf Boldrewood

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A MODERN BUCCANEER

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BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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CHAPTER XIV

NORFOLK ISLAND—ARCADIA

And now, my innocence and lack of complicity in Hayston's irregularities having been established, a revulsion of feeling took place in the minds of the captain and officers of the *Rosario* with regard to me.

After the fullest explanations furnished by the traders and others, backed up by the manifest sympathy and good-will of the inhabitants of Strong Island, it became apparent that some sort of reparation was due to me. This took the form of a

courteous invitation to accept a passage to Sydney in H.M.S. *Rosario*, and to join the officers' mess on the voyage. 'I'm afraid that we acted hastily in your case, Mr. Telfer!' said Captain Dupont. 'You have been thoroughly cleared of all accusations made against you. I am bound to say they were very few. And you seem chiefly to have acted as a peacemaker and a power for good. I have gathered that you are anxious to rejoin your friends in Sydney. I shall be glad to have your company on the return voyage. What do you say? I trust you will not refuse; I shall otherwise think you have not forgiven my apparent harshness.'

Thus pressed to return to family and friends—from whom, at times, in spite of my inborn roving propensities, the separation had cost me dear—what could I do but thank the manly and courteous poten-

tate, and comply with an invitation so rarely granted to a South Sea adventurer. I was the more loth to lose the opportunity as there had come upon me of late a violent fit of home-sickness which I in vain strove to combat.

I had in truth now no particular reason for remaining at Kusaie, or indeed anywhere in the South Seas. Hayston was gone; his magnetic influence no longer controlled my will, as in our first acquaintance. The *Leonora*—our pride and boast, our peerless floating home—no longer 'walked the waters like a thing of life,' but lay dead, dismantled, dishonoured on the ruthless coral rocks which had crushed the life out of her on that fatal night.

I realised now with thankfulness that I had narrowly escaped being liable as an accessory for some of Hayston's ultra-legal proceedings—to call them by no harsher name.

How often, indeed, in the reckless daring of boyhood is the fatal line crossed which severs imprudence from crime! The inexorable fiat of human justice knows no shade of criminality. 'Guilty or not guilty,' goes forth the verdict. There is no appeal on earth. And the faulty but not all evil-natured victim is doomed to live out all the years of a life branded as a felon, or maddened by the fears which must ever torture the fugitive from justice!

If I stayed in the South Seas on my present footing, nothing remained but the trader's life, pure and simple. I had little doubt that I could make a living, perhaps a competence, in years to come. But that meant exile in every sense of the word. Complete severance from my kindred, whom my soul yearned to see again; from the friends of my boyhood; from the loved and lovely land of my

birth; from the thousand and one luxuries, material and intellectual, which are comprehended in the word civilisation. I had slaked my thirst for adventure, danger, and mystery. I had carried my life in my hand, so to speak, and times without number had doubted whether I should retain that more or less valuable possession for the next ten minutes. I had felt the poisoned arrows at Santa Cruz hurtling around me, even hiss through my waving locks, when the death-scratch summoned a man on either hand. I had nearly been 'blue sharks' meat,' as Hayston phrased it, on coral strand amid 'the cruel crawling foam.' All chances and risks I had taken heedlessly in the past. But now I began to feel that I must pronounce the momentous decision which would make or mar my future career. The island life was very fair. For one moment I saw

myself the owner of a trading station on Pingelap or Arurai. I am sitting in a large, cool house, on soft, parti-coloured mats, surrounded by laughing girls garlanded and flower-crowned. Around and above, save in the plantation which surrounds the house, is the soft green light of the paradisal woodland illumining its incredible wealth of leafage, fruit, and flowers. Before me lies the endless, azure sea-plain. And oh, my sea! my own, my beloved sea! Loved in childhood, youth, and age, if such be granted to me! In my ears are the magical murmurous surge-voices, to the lulling of which I have so often slept like a tired child. Fruit and flowers —love and war—manly effort—danger—high health—boundless liberty,—all things necessary to the happiness of primeval man, before he became sophisticated by the false wisdom of these later ages, should

I not possess in profusion? Why, then, should I not remain in this land of changeless summer—this magic treasure-house of all delights of land and sea?

. . . . .

Long and anxiously did I ponder over my decision. Those only who have known the witchery of the 'summer Isles of Eden,' have felt the charm of the dream-life of the Southern Main—the sorcery of that lotus-eating existence, alternating with the fierce hazards and stormy delights which give a richness to life unknown to a guarded, narrowed civilisation—can gauge my irresolution.

I had well-nigh resolved to adhere to the trader's life—until I had made a fortune with which I could return in triumph—when I thought of my mother! The old house with its broad, stone-paved verandah came back to me—the large,

'careless-ordered' garden with its trailing, tropical shrubs and fruit-trees—the lordly araucarias, the boat-house, the stone-walled bath wherein I had learned to swim—all came back in that moment when memory recalled the scenes and surroundings of my early life. I could hear a voice ever low and sweet, as in the days of my childhood, which said, 'Oh, my boy! my boy! come back—let me see my darling's face before I die.'

I was conquered—the temptations of the strange life, with its sorceries and phantasms, which had so long enveloped me, were swept away like a ghost-procession at dawn. And in their place came the steadfast resolve to return to the home of my youth, thenceforward to pursue such modes of life as might be marked out for me. In a new land like my birth-place, with a continent for an arena, I had no fear but

that a career would open itself for me. In no country under heaven are there so many chances of success, so many roads to fortune, as in the lone wastes upon which the Southern Cross looks down. On land or sea, the tracks are limitless, the avenues to fortune innumerable. Gold was to be had for the seeking; silver and gems lay as yet in their desert solitudes, only awaiting the adventurer who, strong in the daring of manhood, should compel the waste to disclose its secrets — only awaited the hour and the man.

For such enterprises was I peculiarly fitted. So much could then be said without boast or falsehood on my part. My frame, inured to withstand every change of temperature which sea or land could furnish, was of unusual strength. By hard experience I had learned to bear myself masterfully among men of widely various

dispositions and characters. I took my stand henceforth as a citizen of the world —as a rover on sea and land—as more than a suppliant to fortune, a 'Conquistador.'

. . . . .

The homeward voyage being now fairly commenced, I began to speculate on the probabilities of my future career. During the years which I had passed among the islands I had acquired experience—more or less valuable—but very little cash. This was chiefly in consequence of our crowning disaster, the wreck of the *Leonora*. But for that untoward gale, my share of the proceeds of the venture would have exceeded the profits of all my other trading enterprises. As it was, I was left, if not altogether penniless, still in a position which would debar me from making more than a brief stay with my friends in

Sydney, unless I consented to be beholden to them for support. That I held to be impossible. For a few weeks I felt that my finances would hold out. And after that, was there not a whole world of adventures—risks, hardships, dangers, if you will—all that makes life worth living—open before me? The curtain had fallen upon one act of the life drama of Hilary Telfer. What of that? Were there not four more, at least, to come?

Even the princess had not arrived. There had been a 'first robber' on the boards, perhaps—even more of that persuasion. But the principal stage business was only commencing—the denouement was obviously far off. Thereupon my hopes rose as if freshly illumined. My sanguine nature — boundless in faith, fertile in expedient — reasserted itself. Temporarily depressed, more in sympathy with Hayston

than with my own ill-luck, it seemed more vigorous and elastic in rebound than ever. The memory of my island life became faint and dreamily indistinct. The forms of Hayston, the king and queen, of Lālia, with sad, reproachful gaze—of Hope Island Nellie, lifting a rifle with the mien of an angered goddess—of Kitty of Ebon, incarnate daughter of the dusky Venus—of the bronzed and wrinkled trader, with blood and to spare on his sinewy hand—of young Harry and the negro Johnny. All these forms and faces, once so familiar, seemed to recede into the misty distance until they faded away from my mental vision.

With them passed into shadow-land the joyous life of my youth—of the untrammelled, care-free existence—such as no man may find again in this world of slow, tracking care and hasty disenchantment. 'Was I wise,' I asked myself again and again,

'in quitting it for the hard and anxious pursuits of the Continent? Were there not a dozen places besides Strong's Island where I should be welcomed, feted, caressed, almost worshipped as a restored divinity? Was it well to abandon the rank which I had acquired among these simple people? Was it——' But no. For ever had I made the decision. Once resolved, I disliked changing my plans. Burdened with a regret which for days I could neither subdue nor remove, I adhered unflinchingly to my resolution, and addressed myself to the steady contemplation of the future.

Now had commenced for me a new life —a new world, socially speaking. The quiet reserve and unemotional bearing of the British officer was substituted for the frank accost and reckless speech of the island trader or wandering mariner. I

was prompt, however, to assimilate the modish bearing of my companions, and assisted by some natural alertness, or perhaps inherited tendencies, soon became undistinguishable from the honourables and lordlings of the gun-room. Upon my repose of manner, indeed, I was often complimented. 'By Jove, old fellow,' one of the offshoots of the British aristocracy would say, 'one would think you had been at Rugby or Eton. And I suppose you have never seen England. Certainly you have the pull of us in make and shape. I can't think how they grow such fellows, —more English than the English,—with your blue eyes and fair hair, too, in these God-forsaken regions.'

'Because,' I said, 'I am of as pure English blood as yourself; have been reared, and moulded, and surrounded by English people, and have all the traditions

of the old country at my fingers' end. For the rest, I hold that this end of the world is more favourable to the growth of Anglo-Saxons, as you call yourselves, than the other.'

'Well, it looks like it, I must say,' said my new friend. 'I only hope that when the time comes for fighting, by sea and land—and, mark my words, come it will—that you will be found as stanch as I think you are.'

'Be sure we shall be,' said I. 'We have inherited the true English "grit," as Americans say. You all said *they* couldn't fight when their war began; when it finished, the world gave a different verdict. We are our fathers' sons, neither more nor less. The bull-dog and the game-cock still fight to the death in our country. Many a time have I seen it. And so will we when our time comes, and when we think it worth our while.'

. . . . .

We carried an order from the New South Wales Government to call in at Norfolk Island—once the ocean prison of the more desperate felons of the old convict régime, who had been replaced by the descendants of the Pitcairn Islanders. They in their turn the descendants of mutinous sailors and Tahitian women—now the most moral, God-fearing, and ideally perfect race on the face of the earth.

What a miracle had been wrought! Who could have imagined that the last days of a rough old sailor, spent among the survivors of a group of savage women who had butchered their mates, could have so firmly fixed the morale of a whole community that virtue should have indelibly impressed itself upon a hundred families? Sydney lies about S.S.W. from Kusaie, but to avoid passing through the dangers of the New Hebrides and the reef-studded vicinity of New Cale-

donia, a direct south course with a little easting was decided upon.

We made Norfolk Island, the distance being about two thousand miles, in ten days' easy steaming from Strong's Island. This lovely island was discovered by Cook in 1774.

A military man, writing of it in 1798, draws a comparison between it and Sydney, much to the disadvantage of the latter. 'The air is soft (he says), and the soil inexpressibly productive. It is a perfect section of paradise. Our officers and their wives were sensibly affected at their departure, and what they regarded as banishment to Sydney.'

Another officer, writing of it in 1847, says: 'It is by nature a paradise adorned with all the choicest gifts of nature—climate, scenery, and vegetable productions. By art and man's policy turned into an earthly hell, disfigured by crime, misery, and despair.'

The island had been brought into a high state of cultivation by convict labour. Its roads, buildings, and gardens were in admirable order. But with the establishment of the new régime—a different race with different tasks—much was neglected, a part became decayed and ruinous. The island is now partitioned into blocks of fifty acres, of which each adult male is allowed one, drawn for and decided by lot.

Whale-fishing is the favourite and most profitable occupation. From this and the sale of farm produce, which finds a market in Sydney, the inhabitants are furnished with all their needs require. Their wants are few, simple, and easily supplied.

The old convict town, with its huge, dilapidated barracks, gaol-officers' quarters, and servants' houses, is situated on the south-east edge of the island, where the little Nepean islet gives sufficient shelter to form a precarious

roadstead available in certain winds. The old town is occupied by the Pitcairn Islanders —in number about three hundred.

Five miles across the island, on its north-eastern shore, and communicating with it by a fair road, lies the Melanesian Mission estate of a thousand acres. Sloping gently down to a low cliff and a rocky shore, the land is an undulating meadow, broken by ravines, and covered with a thick sward of couch-grass or 'doubh,' said to have been imported from India, whence we drew our chief food supplies so many a year ago. Nothing more beautiful in a state of nature had ever been seen, I thought, when I first cast my admiring eyes on it. Here and there gigantic, graceful pines (*Araucaria excelsa*) stood in stately groves. Higher up on the flanks of Mount Pitt (a thousand feet above) grow the lemon and guava, cotton and wild tobacco. The island is nine hundred miles from Sydney and

thirteen hundred and fifty from Cape Pillar, Tasmania. The Nepean and Phillip Islands lie to the south of the main island.

We were in such a hurry to see the famous island and still more famous islanders, that we omitted a precaution which had been earnestly impressed upon us the day before. This was not to attempt to land unless we had a Pitcairner to steer. When the long swell of the Pacific rolls in upon the shallow beaches of Sydney Bay there is no more dangerous place in the world — the roadstead of Madras hardly excepted—than the boat harbour at Norfolk Island.

Like most sailors, and man-of-war's men in particular, the crew was reckless and confident. For myself, I was a fair hand in a boat, and had mixed in so many cases of touch-and-go, where all hands would have fed the sharks in a few more minutes, that I

had lost any sense of caution that I might have originally possessed. As we neared the shore, rising and falling upon the tremendous billows, which told of a scarce-passed gale, I felt a sense of exhilaration to which I had been long a stranger. A party of the islanders, seeing a boat leave the ship, had come down to watch our landing, apparently with interest. As we came closer I noticed them talking rapidly to one another, and occasionally waving their arms to one side or the other as if to direct our steering. There were several women in the group, but as we neared the landing my attention was riveted upon a girl who stood out some distance from the others at the end of a rocky point, which jutted beyond the narrow beach.

I had seen strikingly beautiful faces and faultless forms among the island girls, as, all unconscious, they threw themselves into

attitudes so graceful and unstudied that a sculptor would have coveted them for models. Among these children of nature, roaming at will through their paradisal isles, the perfection of the human form had doubtless been developed. But there was a subtle charm about this girl, as she stood with bare feet beside the plashing wave,—a statuesque presentment of nobility, courage, and refinement which I had never before recognised in living woman. Tall and slender of frame, she yet possessed the rounded outlines which, in all island women, promise a fuller development in the matured stage of womanhood. Her features were delicately regular; in her large dark eyes there was an expression of strong interest, deepening almost into fear, as she gazed at our incoming boat. She had bent slightly forward, and stood poised on her rock as if waiting for a signal to plunge into the

boiling surf. Her complexion was so fair that, but for her attitude, which spoke her a daughter of the sea, one which no mortal born away from the music of the surges could have assumed, I might have taken her for an Englishwoman.

'In the name of all the divine maidens since Nausicaa' (I had not quite forgotten my *Odyssey*, rusty though was my Greek), 'who can she be?' thought I.

At this point my reflections and conjectures came to an abrupt end, as, indeed, nearly did also 'the fever called living' in my particular case. I felt the boat rise heavenwards on the back of a tremendous roller. The islanders shouted as though to warn us of danger, the steersman gave the tiller a wrong turn, or omitted to give it the right one, and the next moment the boat was buried beneath an avalanche of foam, with crew and passengers struggling for their lives.

I could swim well, that is, of course, comparatively, for the difference between the best performance of a white man—well practised from youth though he be—and of an islander is as that of a dog and a fish. Still, having risen to the surface, I had no doubt that I could easily gain a landing. In this I was deceived. As in other spots, the constant surf concealed a treacherous undertow against which the ordinary swimmer is powerless. Again and again did I gain foothold, to be swept back by the resistless power of the backward current. Each time I became weaker, and at length, after a long fruitless struggle, I closed my eyes and resigned myself to my fate. Borne backward and half fainting, I saw the whole party of natives in the water mingling with the crew, who, like myself, had been making desperate efforts to reach the landing.

My senses were leaving me, darkness

was before my eyes, when dimly, as in a dream, I seemed to mark the girl upon the rock plunge with the gliding motion of a seal into the boiling foam. Her bosom shone, as with outstretched arms she parted the foaming tide; her short under-dress, reaching only to the knees, offered no impediment to the freedom of her limbs. I felt soft arms around me. A cloud of dusky hair enveloped me. Strains of unearthly music floated in my ears. It was the dirge of the mermaidens, as they wail over the drowned sailor and bear him with song and lament to his burial cavern. All suddenly it ceased.

. . . . .

The mid-day sun had pierced the roof and side of the cottage wherein I was lying upon a couch, softly matted. When I awoke I looked around. Surely I had been drowned, and must be dead and gone!

How, then, was I once more in a place where the sun shone, where there were mats and signs of ordinary life? I closed my eyes in half-denial of the evidences of my so-called senses. Then, as I raised myself with difficulty, the door opened and a man entered.

He was a tall, grandly-developed Pitcairner, one of the men who had been on board the night before. His face was dark, with the tint of those races which, though far removed from the blackness of the Ethiop, are yet distinct from the pure white family of mankind. But his eyes, curiously, were of bright and distinct blue, in hereditary transmission, doubtless, from that ancestor who had formed one of the historic mutineers of the *Bounty*.

'You've had a close shave, Hilary. That's your name, I believe. A trifle more salt water and you'd have been with the

poor chap that's drowned. We got all the crew out but him.'

'I thought I *was* drowned,' I replied, 'but I begin to perceive that I'm alive. I see you're of the same opinion, so I suppose it's all right.'

'It's not a thing to laugh at,' the Pitcairner said gravely. 'God saw fit to save you this time. To Him and Miranda you owe your thanks for being where you are now.'

'There are people in Sydney,' I said, 'who will be foolish enough to be glad of it, and after I have a little time to think, I daresay I shall be pleased myself. But who is Miranda, and how did she save me?'

'Miranda Christian, my cousin, is the girl you saw standing on the rock. She had a strong fight of it to get you in, and but for one of us going on each side neither of you would have come out. We had been hard

at it trying to save the crew, and nearly left it too late. She was just about done.'

'I shall be uneasy till I thank her. What a brave girl! And what am I to call you?'

'Fletcher Quintal, and her cousin,' the islander replied, drawing himself up and looking at me with a steady gaze. 'You won't see her till the afternoon. She has gone home to rest after staying with you till you came to. My sister, Dorcas, will bring you food directly, and perhaps you'd better rest yourself too till sundown. Then some of us will pay you a visit. Good morning.'

A pleasant-faced damsel, with the sparkling eyes and perfect teeth of the race, came in shortly afterwards, who smilingly informed me that her name was Dorcas Quintal, and that her cousin Miranda had told her she was not to talk much to me.

However, during the time occupied in

making a creditable lunch—all things considered,—I succeeded in convincing her that I was strong enough for a decent dose of gossip, in the course of which I learned several interesting pieces of information about Miranda, who certainly had posed as my Guardian Angel in the late accident. She was, according to Dorcas, the leader in all sports and pastimes, and also the most learned and accomplished damsel on the island. 'She sang and played in their church choir. She had read all the poets in the world,' Dorcas believed. 'She could recite pages and pages of poetry and history. Altogether she was a wonderful girl to be born and brought up in such a place as Norfolk Island, where we never see any one' —here Dorcas wreathed her lips into an expressive pout—'that is, except captains of ships and strangers like yourself.'

'So she is quite perfect,' I said, 'alike on

land and sea. I can vouch for the last. I suppose she can pull an oar and is quite at home in a boat?'

'Indeed she is,' answered Dorcas, warming up. 'She can sail a cutter with any man on the island, and steer a whaleboat besides. You should see her standing up with the big steer oar in those tiny hands of hers.'

'So, then, she has no faults?' I queried, a little mischievously.

The girl smiled. 'I suppose we have all some here as in other places. She is rather proud and quiet, the other girls say. I never saw it, and if there is anything else you must find it out for yourself. And now, as you have finished eating and drinking, I must go. Miranda will be here by and by.'

'Only one word, Dorcas,' said I, as she turned towards the doorway. 'How many admirers has she—all the young men in the island, I suppose?'

'Only one,' she replied, impressively, 'my brother, Fletcher Quintal. He would die for her.'

'And she?'

The girl paused before replying, and gazed earnestly at me.

'She says she will never marry.' And with that she passed out and left me to my meditations.

I must have been fatigued, even bruised and battered by my conflict with sea and shore, as I felt a kind of lassitude creep over me, and presently fell into a dreamless sleep, which lasted till the sun was low and the dimness of the light told me that the day had passed.

I raised myself and saw Miranda sitting on a low stool near the window, or the aperture which served for one. As I turned, she smiled and came towards me, putting out her hand for me to take, and gazing into my face with the frank pleasure of the unspoiled

woman of the woods and fields. 'I have to thank you for my life,' I said, as I pressed her hand warmly. 'It is of no great value to any one, as things have been going lately, but being such as it is, you have my warmest gratitude. I should hardly have changed for the worse if I had been lying beside poor Bill Dacre.'

'You must not talk in that mocking way,' she said, with a pained expression like that of a hurt child. 'God has given us all a life to use for some good purpose. Surely you have friends? perhaps a mother and sisters, who would weep when they heard you were lying under the wave?'

'You are right, Miranda, and I will not talk foolishly again; but I thank you with my whole heart for your noble courage in risking your life to save mine. I wonder now how we both got to land, in spite of that beastly undertow?'

'I could never have done it without help,' she said. 'I was nearly exhausted, yet I did not like to let you go, when Fletcher Quintal and Peter Mills, who had each brought out a man, swam in again, and we came in between them.'

'You seemed to be quite at home in the water,' I said. 'I thought I could swim, and at Strong's Island and other places could hold my own with the natives pretty well. But I found my mistake here.'

'Of course we all swim well,' she replied, smiling, 'and know how to manage a boat. It would be curious if we did not; there is little else to do, in Norfolk Island, except when we are working in the fields. Our life is sometimes dull, I must allow.'

'I hear that you can do all sorts of other things,' I said; 'that you are the chief musician and teacher, besides being commander of the fleet.'

'Dorcas has been chattering, I am afraid,' she answered, while a blush rose to her brow, tinging the pallor of her ivory cheek with faint carmine. 'I certainly have a variety of occupations, and very fortunate it is. Otherwise, I don't know what would happen to me, for I am scarcely as contented as my cousins and the other girls on the island.'

'It is the old story,' I said. 'Now, why should you not be contented on this lovely island, where you have all you could wish for in the world—perfect freedom, a matchless climate, exercise, adventure, the love of your kinsfolk, everything that satisfies the heart of woman?'

'Everything necessary to satisfy a woman's heart!' she said, rising and walking to where the casement admitted a view of the heaving deep with the *Rosario* lying on and off. 'Can you look at the boundless ocean with its thousand paths to the cities of the earth

and not wish to roam? To see the glories of the old world, all the varied richly-coloured life of ancient nations that I have read of and see in my dreams? Do you think men only are impatient of a hemmed-in life? It is not so? Women have their longings for a wider range, a larger sphere; and yet I am perhaps the only girl on the island that feels what I have described.'

'You must have read much,' I said, rather startled at this burst of feeling from the lips of a Norfolk Island damsel—a child of the most contented community in the world. 'These strange yearnings must have been awakened in you through the word-painting of these wicked authors.'

'And why not?' she answered, with heightened colour and flashing eye. 'That my world is one of books I do not deny. I have daily tasks and occupations, but my evenings are my own, and in them I read

and muse. Then this little island, with its patient, primitive people, seems to fade away. I spend hours in Italy, where I revel in Florence, the Pitti Palace, the Arno, and roam the streets of the Eternal City amid the monuments of the world's grandest era, their very decay "an Empire's dust." I fall asleep often when reclining on the banks of "Tiber, Father Tiber, to whom the Romans pray." But, oh! if I begin to wander away in the track of my visions I shall never stop. And you,' she continued with an eager glance, 'you, who have seen men and cities, are you contented to linger away your life under cocoa-palms and bread-fruit trees, taking inglorious ease among simple savages until you become one yourself in all but the colour? Is this what you were born and reared and educated for?'

As the girl thus spoke, with head upraised and exalted mien, her wondrous eyes flashing

with almost unearthly light, her mobile lineaments changing with each varying mood, she looked in her strange and unfamiliar beauty like some virgin prophetess of the days of old, rousing her countrymen to deeds of patriotic valour or self-sacrificing heroism.

All enthusiasm is contagious, more especially when the enthusiast is fair to look upon, and belongs to that sex for, or on account of which, so much of the world's strife has resulted.

For the first time I began seriously to ask myself what motives had led me to waste so large a portion of my youth in heedless wandering among these fairy isles. What were my aims in life? What did I propose to myself? As I looked at the girl's face, aglow with the fire of a noble ambition, I felt humbled and ashamed.

'You have spoken truly, Miranda,' I replied, after a long pause, during which

my fair questioner looked with a far-away gaze across the ocean plain, now quenching its thousand shifting gleams in the quick-falling tropic night. 'I have been idly careless and unheeding of the future, satisfied with the day's toil and the day's pleasure. But I am going back to my people in Australia; there I shall begin a new life. It is a land of duty, of labour, and its enduring reward. There I shall renew the tension of my moral fibre, which has been too long relaxed. But you must not be too hard on me. I have had to face losses, dangers, and misfortunes. I have been wrecked; I lost everything I had in the world. I have been ill; have been wounded; and, but for some of those simple islanders you seem to despise, I should not have been a living man to-day.'

'I do not despise them,' she said; 'of course every one knows that we are descended

from those of Tahiti. I only say that they are not fit companions for white men—I mean of educated white men, who in the end become as bad as they are—even worse—much worse. But tell me about your being ill. And who tended you? Was it a woman?'

'I will tell you all about it to-morrow if you will walk with me and show me some of the scenery of this beautiful island of yours. But it is a long story, and it is too late to begin to-night.'

'I should like it above all things,' she said frankly, 'though you must have seen so many grand places in your roamings that our poor landscapes will hardly interest you.'

'Much depends on the guide,' I said, as I gazed admiringly at her eloquent countenance.

'I know that,' she answered, meeting my too ardent gaze with perfect unconsciousness

of any hidden meaning. 'They tell me I am the best guide on the island, and indeed I should be, for my father and I were never tired of exploring and finding out traces of the old occupation by the Sydney Government, and many curious discoveries we made. So I will come here after breakfast to-morrow.'

She was true to her appointment, and then commenced a series of delightful rambles which, perhaps, I more truly enjoyed than many later and more pretentious travels.

In despite of Miranda's depreciation of her lovely isle we found endless excuses for interest and admiration. It was truly a wonderful little 'kingdom by the sea.' Scraped along the side of a hill would be one of the beautiful roads constructed by the forced labour of the convicts which at one time almost filled the island. Rising from the valley slope were gigantic ferns, broad-

leaved palms, lemons, oranges, guavas, all originally imported, but now flourishing in the wildest luxuriance in the rich soil and semi-tropical climate; while above all, stately and columnar, rose the great Araucaria peculiar to the island—the Norfolk Island pine of the colonists.

Hand in hand we roamed together through this Eden amid the main, as though our great progenitors had again been transplanted to this wondrous wild—a latter-day Adam, by whose side smiled a sinless Eve—pure as her prototype, and yet informed of much of the lore which men had wrested from the rolling ages. Together we explored the gloomy corridors and echoing halls of the ruinous prison-houses—once the dark abodes of sorrow, torment, and despair unutterable.

Miranda shuddered at the thought that these dismal cells and courtyards had echoed to the cries of criminals under the lash—to

the clanking of chains—had even witnessed the death penalty inflicted on the murderer and the mutineer.

Mute and terrible witnesses were they to the guilt to which human nature may descend —to the abysmal depths of despair into which the felon and the outcast may be hurled, when, hopeless of help from God or man, he abandons himself to all the baser instincts.

We seldom lingered amid these sullen retreats, around which Miranda always declared she heard sighs and groanings, sobs, and even shrieks, as though the spirits of those who had suffered, and mourned, and died amidst the horrors unspeakable of prison life still lingered amid the ruins of their place of torment.

How strange, well-nigh impossible, it even seemed to me that the very earth, the dumb witness of crime immeasurable, was

not polluted irredeemably by the deeds that she had perforce endured and condoned. And now—stranger than aught that dreaming poet or seer imagined—that this Inferno should have been transmuted into an Arcadia, purer and more stainless than the fabled land of old, and peopled by the most obediently moral and conscientious family of mankind that had ever gathered the fruits of the earth since the days of our first parents.

Day after day followed of this charmed life—magical, unreal, only in that it transcended all my other experiences in the degree that the glamour of fairyland and the companionship of the queen of Elfland may have exceeded the memorials of Ercildoune. If he was enchanted, I was spellbound even as true Thomas. Never had I met with a companion who combined all the charm of womanhood—the grace and joyousness of girlhood's most resistless period—with

the range of thought and intellectual progress which this singular girl, amid her lonely isle and restricted companionship, had explored. And withal, she had remained in her almost infantine unconsciousness of evil—her virginal, instinctive repulsion of all things forbidden and debarred—like a being of another planet.

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Naturally an end arrived to this blissful state of things. The man-of-war after a few days was compelled to continue her voyage and perform her allotted duties, which comprehended surveys of uncharted coast-lines and suspected rocks. I had to choose between going on to Sydney and remaining in this charmed isle. And here inclination and duty appeared to draw different ways with equal strength. I was naturally anxious to return to my birth-place, my family, and friends. My feelings of home-sickness had

returned with redoubled strength after being long in abeyance. But all such doubts and distrusts were swept away like storm wrack before the swelling surges of Miranda's own isle. I was fain to yield to the resistless force of the passion which now dominated, nay, consumed me. True, I had not as yet definitely assured myself that this purest pearl of womanhood was within my grasp. I had made no proffer of my affections. I had not, in so many words, solicited the priceless gift of hers. But I was not so unskilled in affairs of the heart as to mistake many a sign and symbol from Love's own alphabet, denoting that the outworks of the citadel were yielding, and that the fortress would ere long open gate and drawbridge to the invader.

True to nature's own teaching, Miranda had not scrupled to confess and dilate upon the pleasure my companionship afforded her,

to declare that never before in her life had she been half so happy, to wonder if my sisters would not die of joy when I returned, to chide me for my long absence from them and from such a home as I had often described to her. And all this with the steady eye and frank expression of girlish pleasure, which a less unsophisticated damsel would scarcely have acknowledged without conscious blushes and downcast eyes.

Miranda, on the other hand, stated her sensations calmly and fearlessly, her wondrous eyes meeting mine with all the trustful eagerness of a happy child, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. 'You see, Hilary,' she would say, laying her hand lightly on my arm, and looking up in an appealing manner, 'I have never met any one before who seems to understand my feelings as you do apparently by instinct. You have travelled and been in other places

besides the islands, and you have read books —nearly all those which I have. You know that story in the *Arabian Nights* about the prince that was changed into a bird? He knew that he was a prince, yet he was condemned to be dumb, and was unable to convey his feelings, because to all the world he was only a bird.

'I sometimes think we Pitcairn girls live the life of birds—like that one,' and she pointed to a soaring white-winged sea-bird, which presently darted downwards, falling like a stone upon the blue ocean wave. 'We swim and fish, we are almost more on the sea than the land, we sleep on the land like that white bird, walk a little, talk a little,—that is our whole life. I think the bird has the best of it, as she can fly and we cannot.'

'But you all seem happy and contented,' I said, 'you and your cousins.'

'*They* are, but I seem to have been born

under a different star. I must have inherited some of the restless, adventurous spirit of my ancestor, Fletcher Christian.

'The feeling of unrest and the desire to see the world—the wonderful, ancient, beautiful world of which we read in this island prison, for, lovely as it is, it is but a prison for free souls—becomes so intense at times that I almost dread lest I should end my life like his.'

'And in what way was that?' I asked. 'God forbid you should ever do a deed so terrible,' I said.

'Do you not know? He used to go every day to the top of a high cliff on the south side of Pitcairn to gaze over the ocean —as I have done hundreds of times—thinking, perhaps, of the wonderlands beyond, where he had forfeited the right to live by his own act; and—and one day he threw himself over the cliff, and they found his

body on the rocks below. Poor Fletcher! I can partly understand his feelings.'

This was but one of our many conversations, always fascinating to me, as affording the rare privilege of exploring a mind naturally of high intelligence, developed by patient thought and a wide range of reading, — the island library, enriched by many generous gifts, being by no means a poor one, — guarded from deterioration by an exquisite natural refinement, yet withal clear and limpid as the transparent seas which encircled her home, where the more deeply the eye penetrated the more precious were the treasures disclosed.

So it came to pass that the *Rosario* sailed without me. The Captain and my jolly comrades of the gun-room chaffed me about what they called my imprudent attachment. 'You'll have to turn Pitcairner,' they said, 'and settle down after old Nobbs has spliced

you upon a fifty-acre patch, where you can grow sweet potatoes, yams, and maize to the end of your days. Surely a fellow like you, with a family to go back to, has something better in view than that!'

'I shall not stay on the island,' I said; 'I intend to live in Australia, perhaps near Sydney.'

'Then your island princess will run away and leave you disconsolate. They can't live away from their people and where they were brought up. Some of them insisted on going back to Pitcairn, and are there now. They could not be persuaded from it. They had to let them go. They would have died else.'

'I have resolved,' I said. 'I will take all risks. You shall all come and see us in Sydney. We will live at North Shore, and have a yacht built on the lines of the *Leonora*. Adios!'

So we parted. The *Rosario* got up steam, and once more I watched the black cloud of smoke pouring from her funnels and the waves breaking as she moved majestically across the bright-hued ocean.

Up to the last moment my simple and warm-hearted friends on the island had serious doubts as to whether I was not going off in the *Rosario*. They could hardly understand how I could prefer remaining as their guest and friend when the glory and dignity of a man-of-war — their highest expression of maritime splendour — were open to me.

They had, it is true, implored me to stay with them for a few months longer — the young men were equally pressing with the older members of the community. With artless candour the girls promised that if I would stay Miranda should be my constant companion, and, except on Sundays, when,

as their chief musician and organist, she could not naturally be spared, I should have a monopoly of her society.

'You seem to like her so much,' Dorcas Quintal repeatedly exclaimed. 'And I am certain she likes you more than any one she has ever seen. The worst of it is that she will be so sorry when you have to go away. Clara Young nearly died when her friend went away. That was two years ago. But she got over it in time, and now she is happily married. But she *did* try to drown herself one day, only we were too quick for her.'

'It is a bad thing to have strangers for friends,' I said, 'if it may end so tragically when they leave. I wonder you entertain such dangerous visitors.'

'I suppose we can't help it,' the girl replied laughingly. 'It is so pleasant to talk with men who know the great world we

can only read about. We just take our chance. We have plenty to do, and that prevents from us fretting too much. I dare-say you will hear a little crying to-night. We are all very sorry the big ship is gone.'

'It's the old, old story, Dorcas! Girls are a good deal alike all the world over, I suppose, in many of their ways. But you Pitcairners are certainly different in some respects from any women I know anywhere.'

'What do you mean?' asked the girl eagerly. 'I know we are simple, and have never been taught very much.'

'It isn't that. I will tell you before I go, or rather, I will tell Miranda, and she shall tell you what I say.'

So, with the full approbation of friends and relations of every degree of relationship, and, what was of more consequence, with the good-will of the spiritual pastor and master of the island, whose authority was absolute and

unquestioned, Miranda and I pursued our untroubled way. In this wondrous Arcadia there were no jealousies, no scandals, no asking of intentions, no fiery, disappointed aspirants, no infuriated brothers,—these obstacles to pure and true love were evidently the outcome of a higher or a lower stage of civilisation. No evil consequences had ever occurred from unrestricted freedom of intercourse between the young people since the formation of the community. No such result was regarded as possible. Immutably fixed in my own course, I knew that nothing — humanly speaking — could affect my unalterable resolve. I had discovered a pearl of womanhood, matchless in beauty of mind and body, combining the higher mental qualities, indeed, with such physical perfection as no girl reared under less fortunate conditions was likely to possess. With

regard to the future, if she consented to link her fate with mine I was ready to take all the risks of fortune. The fickle goddess has always favoured the brave, and with Miranda at my side I felt that I could lead the forlorn hopes of desperate endeavour, or endure uncomplainingly the toil and self-denial of the humblest station. I had, it is true, led a careless, somewhat epicurean life in the past, surrendering myself perhaps too readily to the charm of island life. But this was of the past, and the half-instinctive folly period of youth. Henceforth I would essay the culture of the mental qualities with which I had been reasonably gifted, turning to account also that very sound and thorough early tuition through which I had fortunately passed. Thus equipped, and with a helpmate at once loving and practical—devoted to duty and the highest forms of unselfish charity — ambitious only for intellectual

experience and development — I felt that hope became certainty and success a mere matter of detail. After the departure of the *Rosario* I became almost a son by adoption among the elders of the community. I learned to accommodate myself to their ways, after a fashion which was rendered more easy by my years of familiarity with island life. At the same time I was careful not to infringe in the slightest degree upon their peculiar customs, or to shock those religious prejudices which were so earnestly accepted in the community. It was taken for granted that I would settle among them in right of my bride. If I decided to marry Miranda, or any other island maiden, I should be put in possession of a landed estate of fifty acres, where I might dream away life in a round of labour that was half recreation, wandering amid the island groves, reclining under giant ferns or lofty pines, bathing in

crystal founts or clear-hued seas at dawn or under the yellow moon. Passing contentedly from youth to middle age, from that half-way stage to a later span of life, which in this enchanted land implied little or no diminution of natural powers. Should it be so?

This question I had asked Miranda more than once. But she would not consent to take it seriously. One day, however, I compelled her to listen, though she had again declared that we were so happy as we were that no change could be for the better, possibly for the worse—even.

'Then, Miranda,' I answered, 'I must leave the island. Did we not hear from the last whaler that called in for fresh provisions that my old friend—the friend of the family, Captain Carryall, was to touch here in the *Florentia*?' He was the best known, the most popular of all the skippers

next to Captain Hayston. Unlike him, however, his reputation was spotless, while for fair dealing and adherence to his promises his fame was proverbial. 'Shall I go with him?' I said, 'and must I go alone?'

'And would you leave me?' she asked imploringly—her dark eyes turned towards my face in a passion of reproachful tenderness, of which she herself scarce understood the meaning. 'Oh! I thought once that I could let you go, though it has been life and happiness untold having you to talk to and read with. I fancied I should only mourn for you for a while—like the other island girls who weep and lament, and then dry their tears and dance and sing as if nothing had happened. But, oh! it is not so with me. They always say the Fletcher-Christians are different. I shall die! I shall die! I know I shall.'

And with that she cast herself on my

neck, sobbing as though her heart would break; in the same breath declaring that she would never consent to spoil my life by marriage with a poor savage island girl, but a few degrees superior to the women of Pingelap and Ocean Island, whom she had so often despised.

By degrees I persuaded her to listen to my pleadings, and then calmly set before her my plans for the future. We must be married here, and after remaining on the island, living the idyllic life we were revelling in now, we would sail for Sydney in the *Florentia*, or some other vessel, and there begin life in earnest. Some employment would be found, doubtless, which would pave the way, by which I might make a serious effort towards a career, perhaps a competency in the future, or even a fortune.

I had but little difficulty in carrying out

my plan. The elders of the community, the relations and friends of Miranda, were overjoyed at the prospect of her marriage with a person of my position, who might also be enabled to do them many a good turn if I settled in Sydney, a port with which they had close business relations. I found, too, that I was not altogether an unknown personage. Some of the young men who had made voyages in whale-ships had heard of my companionship with Captain Hayston. However, it would seem that all the natives whom they had met had given a good account of me as a fair dealer, and, moreover, generous in my treatment of them — an apparently unimportant matter at the time, but serious enough now. Miranda told me afterwards, that had it been otherwise nothing would have induced her guardians to give their consent, or her to defy their decision.

As it was, however, all seemed *couleur de rose*. No great preparations were needed. The simple island fashion was not encumbered with any great multiplication of garments. On the happy day Miranda was escorted to the modest building which did duty for a church by a band of white-robed maidens, in whose dark hair were wreathed the crimson blossoms of the coral plant and the hibiscus, with little other adornment but nature's furnishing in the flower-time of life. My comrades were selected from the younger men of the island, among whom I had always taken care to stand well, joining in their sports, and entering as an equal competitor their athletic contests. I was therefore looked upon as a most desirable acquaintance, able to hold my own, moreover, in all manly accomplishments (except swimming), and much esteemed for a gift of relating adventures in strange lands, and

describing the foreign manners and customs with which a roving life had made me familiar.

It might have been imagined that a girl so singularly gifted and attractive as Miranda would have had lovers in abundance, by whom a successful aspirant like myself would be regarded with jealousy. Unlikely as it may appear, I observed no feeling of this kind. In that strange society, the passions which rage so fiercely in more civilised communities appeared to have lost their force, or to flow with the peaceful motion of the incoming tide rather than the resistless rush of a mountain torrent, which love, hate, jealousy, and envy in other lands so often resemble. The young men admired Miranda, indeed, worshipped her from afar. But they seemed rather elated by her good fortune, as it so appeared to them, than enviously disposed, and had no

thought of other than the warmest friendship for their more fortunate companion. Even Fletcher Quintal, who might have been expected to view with dislike, if not a stronger sensation, my marriage with his favourite cousin, had apparently no feeling of this sort. He certainly expressed none, but congratulated me with all the warmth which a brother might be supposed to exhibit at the marriage of his best-loved sister with his dearest friend. Truly it *was* the long-lost rediscovered Arcadia. There were moments when I doubted whether it was wise to leave a land where care was unknown; where want, with its attendant evils, had never been heard of; where there were no rich men to envy, no bad ones to fear, no poor to despise; where no one died but of old age or mishap; whence all the ills that flesh is heir to had, like the snakes of Ireland, been ban-

ished by some good genius, and only the gifts of virtue, contentment, and regulated industry remained. But there was wild blood in my veins, long dormant as it had lain. The murmur of the ocean seemed to call me with a tone of magical power. I longed for the wave-music once more — for the voyage which was to speed me to my birth-land. I hurried on the preparations for our wedding, and, lingering though were all the slow sweet hours, endless the days, almost tedious the soft starlight glow of the summer nights, the day of days at last dawned that was to herald the happiness of a life-time.

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Our small domain had been carefully measured and marked out for us. A cottage had been built, thatched with palm leaves, floored with the soft mats of the island, simply furnished, and as it happened near

to a bubbling spring, and shaded by the wondrous wild orange, which here grows almost to the height and girth of a forest tree. It happened to be the flower-time of these charming fruit-bearers, so that wreaths and garlands of the blossom sacred to Hymen were plentiful and profuse.

CHAPTER XV

EPITHALAMIUM

Our marriage day! Oh, day of days! Dawn of a new existence! All nature seemed to sympathise with us in our supernal joy. For us, for us alone in all the world the streamlets murmured, the breezes whispered together, the wavelets plashed musically, the blue sky glowed, the sun shone goldingly. The venerable pastor of the community—he who had watched over every man and woman present from infancy, who had christened, and married, and buried the whole population of the island as they require these offices—read the time-honoured

service of the Church of England, which was followed with deepest reverential attention by all present. When he blessed our union in the solemn language of the ritual, familiar to me in the days of my childhood, every head was bowed, each woman's eye was wet with heart-felt sympathy and warmest affection for their erst-while playmate.

The day was cloudless, a breeze at times sighed through the fragrant foliage of the grove wherein the little church had been built. The wavelets murmured on the beach, and the unresting surges seemed but to exchange loving memories of coral islands and crystal seas, of waving palms and the green gladness of tropic forests, of maidens, feather-crowned and flower-bejewelled, dancing on silver strands beneath the full-orbed midnight moon, or gliding, a laughing bevy of syrens, beneath the trans-

lucent wave. No sullen, dirge-like refrain on that paradisal day brought from the ocean voices the memory of drifting wrecks, of stormy seas, of drowned seamen—no hint of danger, of despair, of pestilence, and death; and yet all these phases of experience I had known and reckoned with even in my short life.

No; these and kindred ills were forgotten, banished from earth and sea. On this blissful morn the golden age of the earth seemed to have returned. Recalling the half-forgotten classics of my boyhood, I could fancy that I saw fauns peeping through the leaves of the orange grove, that the ages had reverted to the freshness of the elder world, when the flush of the fair Arcadian life informed all things with divinity.

And Miranda, my bride of brides! what words can describe her as she stood, with

an expression half-timid, half-rapt, and inspired, before the humble altar that day? Her simple dress of virgin white, which but slightly concealed while it outlined the curves of her statuesque form; her large dark eyes, which had often appeared to me to hold a shade of melancholy, were now irradiated by the love-light which she, in the purity and innocence of her heart, made no attempt to conceal. Her soft, abundant tresses had been gathered up into becoming form and classic simplicity, and, save a wreath of scarlet berries and the traditional orange blossom, she wore no ornament. As all unconscious of her maiden loveliness she stood beside me, with her head raised and an expectant smile which disclosed her pearly teeth, she seemed to my enraptured gaze a daughter of the wave, —no mortal maiden, but a being compact of air and sea and sky, visible but beneath

the moonbeams, and unrevealed to the dwellers of the garish day.

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We had been but a month wedded; our simple home, our tiny domain, our forest rambles, our sea-baths at dawn and eve, as yet contented us — filled us with all fullest delight in which mortal beings can revel beneath this ethereal dome. And yet the spirit of unrest, the veritable serpent of the world's fairest Aïdenns, gradually found means to discover himself.

Miranda and I had, indeed, begun to dis cuss our projected voyage to Sydney, and I had many times described to her an ideal home on one of the thousand-and-one bays which render the northern shore of the unrivalled Sydney harbour matchless in beauty and convenience for those who, like myself, have salt water in their blood. She agreed with me, that with a boat, a garden, a bath-

house, and a cottage built of the beautiful white, pink-veined sandstone which is so abundant beneath and around Sydney, existence might be endured away from her island home, with the aid of books and the inspiring idea of the coming fortune.

'And even if we do not make money,' she said, 'as people call it—what a strange idea it seems to me, who have hardly ever seen any!—we shall be happy. I can't imagine people who are married and love each other ever being unhappy. Then your mother and sisters—I am so much afraid of them. They will regard me as a kind of savage, I am sure; and, indeed, compared with them, or real civilised people, I am afraid that I shall feel like one. And, oh! shall we ever be happier than we are now? Why should we change? Do you think we can come back now and then and visit my people? I should break my heart

if I thought I should see them no more!'

I promised this and other things, doubtless, at the time. But before we had completed the conversation about our future life — which indeed supplied us with endless subjects of interest—the great island wonder-sign appeared. A shout—a rush of excited people past our hut told of a ship in sight. We were down at the beach nearly as soon as the others, and as a long, low barque came up before the wind, something told me that she was the *Florentia*.

A boat — a whaleboat, with a Kanaka crew—put off soon after she was at anchor, and in the tall man at the steer-oar, whose commanding figure, even at that distance, I seemed to know, there was no difficulty in identifying our old friend Captain Carryall.

Directly he jumped ashore, a dozen of the islanders dashed into the surf and ran the

boat up on the beach. Our recognition was mutual.

'Well, young fellow!' he said, 'I've been hunting you up half over the South Seas. Wherever have you stowed yourself all this time? Why, what a man you've grown—a couple of inches taller than me, and I'm no pony. Brown as a berry, too! You'll have to come home with me this trip. Your old man's beginning to get anxious about you—and you know he's not much in that line,—and your mother and sisters.'

'Captain Carryall,' I said, 'there's no necessity for more reasons. I'm going to Sydney with you if you'll give me a passage.'

'Half a dozen if you want it,' quoth the jolly sailor. 'And now I must have a word with my friends. Anybody been married since I was here last? No Quintals—no Millses? Mary, how's this? Dorcas—

Grace—Mercy Young, I'm ashamed of you. And Miranda! Nobody run away with you yet? I see I must take you to Sydney and show you at a Government House ball. Then they'd see what a Pitcairn girl was like.'

'You may do that yet,' I said, 'for, seriously, Miranda is now Mrs. Hilary Telfer. We have been married more than a month.'

The captain could not refrain from giving a prolonged whistle at this announcement, which certainly appeared to take him by surprise. However, he rallied with ease and celerity, and addressing Miranda, whose hand he took as he spoke, said, 'My dear! let me congratulate the son of my old friend, Captain Telfer, upon his marriage with the best, cleverest, and prettiest girl I have fallen across in all my wanderings. I don't suppose you have any great amount of capital to begin life with; but if two young people

like you don't manage to find some path to fortune in a country like Australia, I'm a Dutchman. He needs to be a good fellow, and a man all round, to be worthy of Miranda Christian ; but he can't help, as the son of his father and his mother, being all that, and more. So now, my dear, you must let me kiss you, as your husband's old friend, and wish you all happiness.'

Miranda blushed as the warm-hearted fellow folded her in his arms, but submitted with becoming grace; and leaving her among her young friends, he and I strolled away towards our hut to talk over affairs more at leisure.

'Well, youngster!' said he, laying his hand on my shoulder, 'I suppose you've had enough island life for a while, and won't be sorry to see Sydney Heads again. Nor I either. I've been out fifteen months this time, and that's rather long to be away from

one's home and picaninnies. They'll be glad to see your face again at Rose Bay, I'll be bound. But they certainly will be taken aback when you turn up as a married man. Nineteen times out of twenty it's a mistake to tie one's self up for life at your age. But all depends upon getting the right woman, and Miranda is the one woman in a thousand that a man might be proud to marry, whether he was rich or poor, and to work and wear out his life for all his days. I've known her since she was a baby, and, taking her all round, I don't know her equal anywhere. It seems queer to say so, considering her birth and bringing up. But these Pitcairners are well known to be the best and finest women, in all womanly ways, that the world can show. And your wife is, and has always been, the flower of the flock.'

I grasped the captain's hand. I knew that I had secured a powerful ally; and

though I felt so secure in the wisdom of my choice that no disapprobation of family and friends would have had power to affect me, yet, in such matters, it is well to have a friend at court, and the captain's reputation for sense and sagacity stood so high, that I felt not only my relatives, but my acquaintances and friends, would be strongly swayed by his judgment.

'Now that we've got so far,' he said, 'you had better make your arrangements to sail with me on Sunday morning; this is Thursday, but my passengers want to see the island and the people of whom they have heard so much.'

'Passengers!' I said. 'How many? and where from?'

'Well, I picked them up at Honolulu. Half a dozen, and very nice people, too. They came in an English yacht that went to San Francisco for them, and they wanted to

see Australia, and so came with me. They're rather big people at home, I believe, though they're very quiet, and give themselves no airs.'

'Any ladies?'

'There are two married couples, and a young lady, with her brother.'

'That's very serious, captain,' said I. 'I don't quite know how Miranda will get on with travelling Englishwomen—they're rather difficult sometimes.'

'Miranda will get on with any one,' answered the captain, with a decided air. 'She will sit on my right hand, as a bride, and no one in my ship will show her less than proper respect. Anyhow, these people are not that sort. You'll see she's all ready to start on Sunday morning. "The better the day, the better the deed."'

So the captain went to pay a visit to the people of the settlement, among whom his

free, pleasant manner and generous bearing had made him most popular. The girls crowded around him, laughing and plying him with questions about the commissions he had promised to execute for them, and the presents he had brought. These attentions he never omitted. Full of curiosity they were, too, about the English ladies on board. 'How they were dressed?' 'How long they would stay in Sydney?' 'What they would think of the poor Pitcairn girls?' and so on.

With the elders he told of the whale-ships he had spoken, and of their cargoes of oil—of the Quintals, or Youngs, Mills, or M'Coys who were harpooners and boat-steerers on board some of the Sydney whalers, and of the chances of their 'lay' or share of profit being a good one. Besides all this, the captain consented to act as their ambassador to the Governor-General in Sydney,

and lay before that potentate certain defects of their island administration—small, perhaps, in themselves, but highly important to the members of an isolated community. In addition to all this, he (as I heard afterwards) specially attended to my marriage with Miranda, of which he highly approved; telling the old pastor and the elders of the community that he had known my father for ever so many years; that he was highly respected now, when retired, but had been well known in the South Seas and New Zealand many years ago as the captain of the *Orpheus*, one of the most successful whalers that ever sailed through Sydney Heads.

'Captain Telfer of the *Orpheus!*' said one of the oldest men of the group, 'I remember him well. I was cast away on Easter Island the time the *Harriet* was wrecked in a hurricane. He gave me a free

passage to Tahiti, a suit of clothes, and ten dollars when I left the ship. He wanted me to finish the voyage with him and go to Sydney. I was sorry afterwards I didn't. He was a fine man, and a better seaman never trod plank. No wonder Hilary is such a fine chap. I can see the likeness now. I don't hold with our young women going off this island in a general way, but Miranda is a lucky girl to have Captain Telfer's son for a husband.' All this the captain told me afterwards with slight embellishments and variations of his own.

My reputation had fairly gone before, but this light thrown on my parentage placed me in a most exalted position—next to their spiritual pastor and master, before whom they bowed in genuine respect and reverence. Perhaps there is no man in the whole world more honoured and admired in the South Seas than the captain of a ship. And now

that the name of my father's barque, once pretty well known south of the line, had been recalled from the past, every doubt as to the future of Miranda and myself was set at rest.

We were invested, so to speak, with the blessing of the whole community, and began our modest preparations with added cheerfulness and resolve.

In the afternoon we saw a boat put off from the *Florentia* and the visitors land. They were five in number. We could see them walk over to the village, where they were met by some of the principal people and a few of the women and girls. We had been making ready for our voyage, and having finished our simple meal, sat in the shade of our orange tree, near the door, and awaited the strangers whom I judged rightly that curiosity and the captain would bring to our dwelling.

In less than an hour's time we saw them strolling along the path which led to our nest. As they approached we arose and went to meet them, when the captain with all due form introduced us, 'The Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Craven, Colonel Percival, Mr. Vavasour, and his sister, Miss Vavasour.' Mrs. Percival had remained on board, as her little boy of four or five years old was not well. Miranda, rather to my surprise, was perfectly unembarrassed, and talked away to the stranger ladies as if she had been accustomed to the society business all her life.

I could see that they were pleased and surprised at her appearance, as also gratified with the manner in which she invited them to inspect our simple dwelling.

'Oh! what a charming nest of a place—quite a bower of bliss!' cried Miss Vavasour. 'I declare I will come here when I am married and spend my honeymoon. What

shade and fragrance combined! What a lovely crystal lakelet to bathe in! and I suppose, Mrs. Telfer, you go out fishing in that dear canoe? What an ideal life!'

'I quite agree with you and feel quite envious,' said Mrs. Craven. 'Charlie and I have been married too long to have our honeymoon over again; but it would have been idyllic, wouldn't it, Charlie?'

'Splendid place to smoke in,' assented her husband. 'No hounds meet nearer than Sydney, though, I presume. Drawback rather, isn't it?'

'You men are always thinking of horses, and hounds or guns,' pouted Miss Vavasour. 'What can one want with them here? What can life offer more than this endless summer, this fairy bower, this crystal wave, this air which is a living perfume? It is an earthly paradise.'

'And the beloved object,' added Mrs.

Craven, with quiet humour. 'You have left him out. It would be an incomplete paradise without Adam.'

'Oh, here he comes!' exclaimed Miranda (as she told me afterwards), who had not been attending to the enthusiastic speech, but was watching bird-like for my approach.

'Who? Adam?' said Miss Vavasour, laughingly.

'Oh no!' answered she, smiling at the apparent absurdity. 'You must excuse me a little, but I was looking out for Hilary.'

'Now, then, ladies!' said the cheerful voice of Captain Carryall, 'we must get back to our boat. It's dangerous to stop ashore all night, isn't it, Miranda? We must leave you to finish your packing. It's a long voyage to Sydney, eh? It may be years before you see the island again.'

We all went down together to the boat, where the visitors were seen off by all the

young people of the island, the girls wondering with respectful admiration at the English ladies' dresses, hats, boots, and shoes—in fact, at everything they did and said as well. It was a revelation to them. Not that they had any envious feeling about those cherished possessions; they had been too well trained for that, and were secure in the guidance of their deeply-rooted religious faith and lofty moral code. On the other hand, their visitors admired sincerely the noble forms and free, graceful bearing of the island maidens, as well as the splendid athletic development of the men.

'Here, you Thursday Quintal, come and show these ladies how you can handle a steer-oar,' called out the captain. 'He was the boat-steerer on board the *Florentia* one voyage, and steered in the pulling race for whaleboats at the regatta on Anniversary Day, which we won the year before last in

Sydney harbour. We'll bring you ashore in the morning.'

'Ay, ay, captain,' said the young fellow, showing his splendid teeth in a pleasant smile. 'It will feel quite natural to take an oar in a boat of yours again.'

The wind had freshened during the afternoon, and the rollers on the beach lifted the whaleboat as she came up to the landing rather higher than the ladies fancied. However, they were carefully seated, and at the captain's word, 'Give way, my lads,' the crew picked her up in great style, while Quintal, standing with easy grace at the stern, the sixteen-foot oar in his strong grasp, directed her course with instinctive skill so as to avoid the growing force of the wave. As he stood there—tall, muscular, glorious in the grace and dignity of early manhood—he seemed the embodiment of a sculptor's dream.

'What a magnificent figure!' said Mrs. Craven to her young friend. 'How rare it is to see such a form in Mayfair!'

'I surmise, as our American girl said at Honolulu,' replied Miss Vavasour, 'that you might look a long time before you saw such a man among our "Johnnies"; and what eyes and teeth he has! Really I feel inclined to rebel. Here's this Mr. Telfer, too, and what a grand-looking fellow he is, and an English gentleman besides in all his ways. He can make his way to this out-of-the-way speck in the ocean, and secure a Miranda for a life-companion—glorious girl she is too—while we poor English spins have to wait till a passable *pretendu* comes along, —old, bald, stupid, or diminutive, as the case may be,—and are bound to take him under penalty of dying old maids. I call it rank injustice, and I'd head a revolution to-morrow; and oh!——'

The interjection which closed the speech of this ardent woman's righter was caused by the onward course of a breaking wave, which was not avoided so deftly as usual, and splashed the speaker and Mrs. Craven.

'Hulloa! Quintal, what are you about?' said the captain. 'Is this your steering that I've been blowing about to these ladies and gentlemen? Miss Vavasour, I'm afraid it's your fault. You know the rule aboard ship? —Passengers are requested not to speak to the man at the wheel.'

'But there's no regulation, captain, that the man at the steer-oar is not to look at the passengers,' said Mrs Craven. 'However, here we are nearly on board, so there's no harm done, and we're only a trifle damped.'

. . . . .

Clear-hued — calm — waveless — dawned our farewell day. I was glad of it. Rain and storm-clouds lower the spirits more

distinctly when one is about to make a departure than at any other time, besides the inconvenience of wet or bedraggled garments. It was the Sabbath day, and the pastor arranged a special service in commemoration of Miranda's marriage and departure from the island. All the ship's company that could be spared came, of course ; the visitors made a point of attending. The little church was crowded. Except the youngest children and their guardians, every soul on the island was there.

After the Church of England service, which the islanders had at their fingers' ends, and in which they all most reverently joined, hymns were sung, in which the rich voices of the young girls were heard to great advantage. There was a strange and subtle harmony pervading the part-singing, which seemed natural to the race, more particularly in those parts in which the whole of the con-

gregation joined. As Miranda played on the harmonium, it may have occurred to her friends and playmates, for the last time, many of them could not restrain their tears. The aged pastor after the Liturgy preached a feeling and sympathetic address, which certainly went to the hearts of all present. He made particular allusion to our union and departure.

'One of the children of the island,' he said, 'who had endeared herself to all by her unselfish kindness of heart, who had been marked out by uncommon gifts, both mental and physical, was to leave them that day. She might be absent for years, perhaps they might not see her face again,—that face upon which no one had seen a frown, nor hear that voice which had never uttered an unkind word,' here the greater part of the congregation, male and female, fell a-weeping and lamenting loudly. 'But they must take

comfort; our beloved one was not departing alone, she had been joined in holy matrimony with a youth of whom any damsel might feel proud; he was the husband of her choice, the son of a master mariner well known and highly respected in former years throughout the wide Pacific. He himself had often heard of him in old days, and the son of such a father was worthy to be loved and trusted. The child of our hearts would go forth, even as Rebecca left her home and her people with Isaac, and God's blessing would surely rest upon all her descendants as upon the children of the promise.

'He would ask all now assembled to join in prayers for the welfare of Hilary Telfer and Miranda his wife.'

As the venerable man pronounced the words of the benediction, echoed audibly by the whole of the congregation, the sobs of the women were audible, while tears and

stifled sighs were the rule and not the exception. As the congregation rose from their knees, we walked down to the *Florentia's* boats, it having been so arranged by the captain, who had invited all who could by any means attend, to lunch on board his vessel. Farewells were said on the beach to all who were perforce detained by age, infirmity, or other causes, and at length we were safely seated in the captain's boat, and putting off, were followed by a perfect fleet of every size and carrying capacity.

Miranda hid her face and wept silently. I did not attempt to persuade her to moderate her grief; as the outlet of overstrung feelings, of genuine and passionate regret, it was a natural and healthful safety-valve for an overburdened heart.

'I don't think I was ever more impressed with our Church service,' said Mrs. Craven. 'That dear, venerable old man, and his truly

wonderful congregation! How earnestly they listened, and how reverently they behaved!'

'Think of our rustics in a village church!' said Miss Vavasour, 'the conceited choir, the sleeping labourers, the giggling school children. Where do you ever see anything like what we have witnessed to-day? However did they manage to grow up so blameless, and to keep so good and pure-minded? Can you tell me, Mr. Telfer?'

'My knowledge of my wife's people is chiefly from hearsay,' I said. 'I can remember the old tale of the Mutiny of the *Bounty* when I was a school-boy in Sydney. Captain Bligh, of the ill-fated ship, was afterwards the Governor of New South Wales. Whether his conduct provoked the mutiny, of which Miranda's great grandfather was the leader, or whether the crew were overcome by the temptations of a life in that second garden of Eden, Tahiti, has been

disputed, and perhaps can never be definitely known. This much is certain, that the sole surviving mutineer, John Adams, deeply repentant, changed his rule of life. Morning and evening prayer was established, and a system of instruction for the children and young people regularly carried out. Such was the apparently accidental commencement of the religious teaching of the little community at the beginning of the century. Some of the results you have witnessed to-day.'

'It certainly is the most wonderful historiette in the whole world,' said Miss Vavasour, who had listened with deep interest. 'I never saw so many nice people in one place before—all good, all kind, all contented, and all happy. It makes one believe in the millennium; I must try what I can do with our village when I get back to Dorsetshire.'

'You'll have your work cut out for you, Miss Vavasour,' said Colonel Percival. 'Fancy the old poachers and the hardened tramps, the beer-drinking yokels and the rough field-hands. Work of years, and doubtful then.'

'Oh, dear, why do we call ourselves civilised, I wonder?' sighed the enthusiastic damsel, just awakened to a sense of the duties of property in correlation with the 'rights.' 'I really believe Englishmen—the lower classes, of course—are the most ill-mannered, uncivilised people in the world. Look at those dear islanders, how polite and unselfish they are in their behaviour to each other, and to us! It makes me feel ashamed of my country. Why, even at a presentation to Her Majesty people push, and crush, and look as black as thunder if you tread on their absurd trains.'

'You ought to come out and join the

Melanesian Mission, my dear,' said Mrs. Craven. 'There is no knowing, with your energy and convictions, what good you might do.'

'I wish I could,' said the girl eagerly. 'But I'm not good enough, I wish I was. If I felt I could keep up my present feelings I'd go to-morrow. But I'm selfish and worldly-minded, like my neighbours in Christendom. It would be no use. I should only spoil my own life, and not mend theirs.'

'Such has been the confession of many an earnest reformer, who had started in life with high hopes and a scorn of consequences,' said Mr. Vavasour quietly; 'it is by far the most common result of heroic self-sacrifice. If we did not occasionally see the accomplished fact, as in this case, we might well despair.'

'And this was an accident of accidents,' said Miss Vavasour sorrowfully. 'No mis-

sionary society sent away the pioneer preachers to the heathen with prayers, and flags, and collections. No, here is the grandest feat ever accomplished in the world's history. The most religious, contented, consistent community in the whole world evolved from a crew of runaway sailors and a few poor savage women! Really there must be some good in human nature after all, reviled and insulted as it is by all the extra good people.'

The *Florentia* had not had so large a party on board since the last successful affair in Sydney harbour. That one included dancing, which did not enter into this entertainment. Nothing, however, could have gone off better. The curiosity of the young women about the ladies' belongings was amply gratified, and the luncheon voted the very best one at which they had ever been entertained.

A mirthful and joyous gathering it was. The visitors were charmed with the naturally refined and courteous manners of the guests. And, finally, as the day wore on, and the breeze from the land promised a good offing, Miranda came up from her cabin, to which she had elected to retire, and bade farewell to friends and kinsfolk, who departed in their boats, much less saddened of mien than they had been in the morning.

. . . . .

Once more at sea. The *Florentia*, though a whaler, and not ornamented up to yachting form, was yet extremely neat and spotlessly clean, as far as could be managed by a smart and energetic captain. She was a fast sailer, and as the wind off the land freshened at sundown, she spread most of her canvas and sped before the breeze after a fashion which would have made her a not unworthy comrade of the *Leonora*.

Miranda had retired to her cabin. Her heart was too full for jesting converse, and after she had watched the last speck of her loved island disappear below the horizon, she was fain to go below to hide her tears, and relieve her feelings by unrestrained indulgence in grief.

For my part, after a cheerful dinner in the cuddy, I remained long on deck, pacing up and down, and revolving in my mind plans for our future. As I felt the accustomed sway of the vessel, listened to the creaking of the rigging, which was music in my ears, and watched the waves fall back from her sides in hissing foam-flakes, as the aroused vessel, feeling the force of the rising gale, drove through the darkening wave-masses, and seemed to defy the menace of the deep, the memories of my early island life came back to me—the luxurious, halcyon days, the starlit, silent nights, when ofttimes

I had wandered to the shore, and seating myself on a coral rock, gazed over the boundless watery waste, wondering ever about my career, my destined fate.

Then returned the strange and wayward memories of Hayston and his lawless associates. The reckless traders, the fierce half-castes, the savage islanders! Again I heard the soft voices of Lālia, Nellie, Kitty of Ebon, and smiled as I recalled their pleading, infantine ways, their flashing eyes, so eloquent in love or hate. All were gone; all had become phantoms of the past. With that stage and season of my life they had passed away—irrevocably, eternally—and now I possessed an incentive to labour, ambition, and self-denial such as I had never before known. With such a companion as Miranda, where was the man who would not have displayed the higher qualities of his nature, who would not have risen to the

supremest effort of labour, valour, or self-abnegation? Before Heaven I vowed that night, that neither toil nor trouble, difficulty nor danger, should deter me from the pursuit of fortune and distinction. So passed our first day at sea.

With the one that followed the gale abated, and as the *Florentia* swept southward under easy sail, comfort was restored. The passengers settled themselves down to the enjoyment of that absolute rest and passive luxuriousness which characterise boardship life in fine weather. Miss Vavasour and Miranda were soon deep in earnest conversation, both for the time disregarding the books with which they had furnished themselves. Mrs. Craven had devoted herself to an endless task of knitting, which apparently supplied a substitute for thought, reading, recreation, and conversation.

I was talking to the captain when a lady

came up the companion, followed by the colonel, who half lifted, half led a fine little boy of four or five years of age.

'Oh,' said the captain, with a sudden movement towards the new arrivals, 'I see Mrs. Percival has come on deck. Come over and be introduced.' We walked over, and I received a formal bow from a handsome, pale woman, who had evidently been sojourning in the East. There is a certain similarity in all 'Indian women,' as they are generally called, which extends even to manner and expression. Long residence in a hot climate robs them of their roses, while the habit of command, resulting from association with an inferior race, gives them a tinge of hauteur—not to say unconscious insolence of manner—which is scarcely agreeable to those who, from circumstances, they may deem to be socially inferior.

So it was that Miranda, in spite of Miss

Vavasour's nods and signals, received but the faintest recognition, and retreated to her chair somewhat chilled by her reception. She, however, took no apparent notice of the slight, and was soon absorbed in conversation with Miss Vavasour, her brother, and Mrs. Craven, who had moved up her chair to join the party. The colonel deserted his former friends to devote himself to his family duties, while the captain and I walked forward and commenced a discussion which had, at any rate, a strong personal interest for me.

'Now look here, Hilary,' said he, as he lighted a fresh cigar. He had been smoking on the quarter-deck under protest, as it were, and thus commenced: 'Listen to me, my boy! I've been thinking seriously about you and Miranda. Your start in life when you get to Sydney is important. I think I can give you a bit of advice worth follow-

ing. You understand all the dialects between here and the Line Islands, don't you?'

'More than eight,' I answered; 'I can talk with nearly every islander from here to the Gilberts. I have learned so much, at any rate, in my wanderings.'

'And a very good thing, too, for it's not a thing that can be picked up in a year, no matter how a man may work, and he's useless or nearly so without it. You can keep accounts, write well, and all that?'

I replied that I had a number of peculiar accounts to keep as supercargo to the *Leonora*, as well as all Hayston's business letters to write; that my office books were always considered neat, complete, and well kept. Then he suddenly said, 'You are the very man we want!'

'Who are we, and what is the man wanted for?' I asked.

'For the South Sea Island trade, and no other,' said Captain Carryall, putting his hand on my shoulder. 'Old Paul Frankston (you've heard of him) and I have laid it out to establish a regular mercantile house in Sydney for the development of the island trade. The old man will back us, and the name of Paul Frankston is good from New Zealand to the North Pole and back again. I will do the whaling, cruising, and cargo business—cocoa-nut oil, copra, and curios—while you will live in one of those nice white houses at North Shore, somewhere about Neutral Bay, where you can see the ships come through the Heads; Miranda can have a skiff, and you a ten-tonner, so as not to forget your boating and your sea-legs. What do you think of that, eh?'

'It is a splendid idea!' I cried, 'and poor Miranda will be within sound of the sea. If she were not, she would pine away like

her own araucarias, which will not live outside of the wave music. But how about the cash part of it? I haven't much. Most of my savings went down in the *Leonora*.'

'Oh, we'll manage that somehow. Old Paul will work that part of the arrangement. I daresay your father will advance what will make your share equal, or nearly so, to ours.'

'It sounds well,' I said. 'With partners like Mr. Frankston and yourself a man ought to be able to do something. I know almost every island where trade can be got, and the price to a cowrie that should be paid. There ought to be a fortune in it in five years. What a pity Hayston couldn't have had such a chance.'

'He'd have had the cash, and the other partners the experience, in less than that time,' said the captain, smiling sardonically. 'He was a first-rate organiser if he had not been such a d—d scoundrel.

He had some fine qualities, I allow; as a seaman he had no equal. In the good old fighting days he would have been a splendid robber baron. But in these modern times, when there is a trifle of law and order in most countries, even in the South Seas he was out of place.'

'He was far from a model mariner,' I said, 'but it hurts me to hear him condemned. He had splendid points in his character, and no one but myself will ever know how much good there was mixed up with his recklessness and despair. I left him, but I couldn't help being fond of him to the last.'

'It was a good thing for you that you did—a very good thing. You will live to be thankful for it. He was a dangerous beggar, and neither man nor woman could escape his fascination. However, that's all past and gone now. You're married and settled, remember,

and you're to be Hilary Telfer, Esq., J.P., and all the rest of it directly, and the only sea-going business you can have for the future is to be Commodore of the Neutral Bay Yacht Club, or some such title and distinction. And now I've done for the present. You go and see what Miranda thinks of it. I won't agree to anything unless she consents.'

Miranda was charmed with the idea of a mercantile marine enterprise, so much in accordance with her previous habits and experiences. The added inducement of living on the sea-shore, with a boat, a jetty, and a bathing-house, decided her. She implicitly believed in Captain Carryall's power and ability to make our fortune; was also certain that, with Mr. Frankston's commercial aid, we should soon be as rich as the Guldensterns, the Rothschilds of the Pacific. She surrendered herself thereupon

to a dream of bliss, alloyed only at intervals by a tinge of apprehension that the great undiscovered country of Sydney society might prove hostile or indifferent.

So much she communicated to Miss Vavasour as she and Mrs. Craven were reclining side by side on their deck chairs, while the *Florentia* was gliding along on another day all sunshine, azure, and favouring breeze.

'Don't you be afraid, my dear,' said the kind-hearted Mrs. Craven, 'you and your husband are quite able to hold your own in Sydney society or any other; indeed, I shall be inclined to bet that you'd be the rage rather than otherwise. I wish I had you in Northamptonshire, I'd undertake to "knock out" (as Charlie says) the local belles in a fortnight.'

Miranda laughed the childishly happy laugh of unspoiled girlhood. 'Dear Mrs.

Craven, how good of you to say so; but, of course, I know I'm a sort of savage, who will improve in a year or two if every one is as kind as you and Miss Vavasour here; but suppose they should be like her,' and she motioned towards Mrs. Percival.

This lady had never relaxed the coldness and hauteur towards Miranda and myself. She had been unable to modify her 'Indian manner,' as Captain Carryall and Mr. Vavasour called it, and about which they made daily jokes.

As she passed the little group, she bowed slightly and without relaxation of feature, going forward to the waist of the ship, where she sat down and was soon absorbed in a book. The three friends smiled at each other, and continued their conversation.

'I should like to dress you for a garden-party, Miranda,' said Miss Vavasour; 'let me see now, a real summer day, such as we

sometimes get in dear old England—not like this one perhaps, but very nice. A lovely old manor-house like Gravenhurst or Hunsdon—such a lawn, such old trees, such a river, a marquee under an elm a hundred years old, and the county magnates marching in from their carriages.'

'Oh, how delicious!' cried Miranda. 'I have read such descriptions in books, but you—oh, how happy you must be to have lived it all!'

'It's very nice, but as to the happiness, that doesn't always follow,' confessed the English girl, with a half sigh. 'I almost think you have the greater share of that. Anyhow just as the company are assembled, I am seen walking down from the house. We are of the house party, you know, Miranda and I. She is dressed in a soft, white, embroidered muslin, very simply made, with a little, a very little Valenciennes lace. Its long straight folds

hang gracefully around her matchless figure, and are confined at the waist by a broad, white moiré sash; white gloves, a white moiré parasol, a large Gainsborough hat with fleecy white feathers, and Miranda's costume is complete—the very embodiment of fresh, fair girlhood, unspotted from the world of fashion and folly.'

CHAPTER XVI

A SWIM FOR LIFE

The words died on her lips as a shriek, wild, agonizing, despairing, rang through the air, and startled not only the little group of pleased listeners, but all who happened to be on deck at the time. We started up and gazed towards the spot whence the cry had come. The colonel, who had been reading on the opposite side of the deck, calmly smoking the while, dropped his book and only saved his meerschaum by a cricketer's smart catch. The captain came bounding up from below, followed by the steward and his boy; the foc'sle hands, with the black

cook, hurled themselves aft. All guessed the cause as they saw Mrs. Percival wringing her hands frantically and gazing at an object in the sea.

Her boy had fallen overboard! Yes! the little fellow, active and courageous beyond his years, had tried to crawl up to the shrouds while his mother's eyes were engaged in the perusal of the leading novel of the day. Weary of inaction, the poor little chap had done a little climbing on his own account, and an unexpected roll of the ship had sent him overboard. Light as the wind was, he was already a long way astern.

Long before all these observations were made, however, and while the astonished spectators were questioning their senses as to the meaning of the confusion, Miranda had sprung upon the rail, and in the next moment, with hands clasped above her head,

was parting the smooth waters. Rising to the surface, she swam with rapid and powerful strokes towards the receding form of the still floating child. With less rapidity of motion, I cast myself into the heaving waste of water; not that I doubted Miranda's ability to overtake and bear up the child, but from simple inability to remain behind while all that was worth living for on earth was adrift upon the wave.

I followed in her wake, and though I failed to keep near her, for the Pitcairn Islanders are among the fastest swimmers in the world, I yet felt that I might be of some use or aid. Long before I could overtake her she had caught up the little fellow, and lifting him high above the water, was swimming easily towards me.

'Oh, you foolish boy!' she cried, 'why did you come after me? Do you want to be drowned again?' Here she smiled and

showed her lovely teeth, as if it was rather a good joke. It may have been, but at that time and place I was not in the humour to perceive it.

'I came for the same reason that you did, I suppose—because I could not stay behind. If anything had happened to you, what should I have done? Here comes the boat, though, and we can talk it over on board.'

Some little time had been expended in lowering the boat. The ship had been brought to, but even then—and with so light a wind—it was astonishing what a distance we had fallen behind. It was a curious sensation, such specks as we were upon the immense water-plain which stretched around to the horizon. However, the *Florentia* was strongly in evidence, and nearer and nearer came the whaleboat, with the captain at the steer-oar, and the men

pulling as if they were laying on a crack harpooner to an eighty-barrel whale.

We were now swimming side by side, Miranda talking to the little fellow, who had never lost consciousness, and did not seem particularly afraid of his position.

'How tremendously hard they are pulling!' I said; 'they are making the boat spin again. One would think they were pulling for a wager.'

'So they are,' answered she, 'for three lives, and perhaps another. See there! God in His mercy protect us.'

I followed the direction of her turned head, and my heart stood still as my eye caught the fatal sign of the monster's presence at no great distance from us. It was *the back fin of a shark!*

'Do your best, my beloved,' she continued; 'we must keep together, and if he overtakes us before the boat reaches,

splash hard and shout as loud as you can. I have seen a shark frightened before now; but please God it may not come to that.'

The boat came nearer—still nearer—but, as it seemed to us, all too slowly. The men were pulling for their lives, I could notice, and the captain frantically urging them on. They had seen the dreaded signal before us, and had commenced to race from that moment. But for some delay in the tackle for lowering, they would have been up to us before now.

As it was we did our best. I would have taken the child, but Miranda would not allow me. 'His weight is nothing in the water,' she said, 'and I could swim faster than you, even with him.' This she showed me she could do by shooting ahead with the greatest ease, and then allowing me to overtake her. I had to let her have her own way.

We were lessening the distance between us and the boat, but the sea demon had a mind to overtake us, and our hearts almost failed as we noticed the sharp black fin gaining rapidly upon us. Still there was one chance, that he would not pursue us to the very side of the boat. It was a terrible moment. With every muscle strained to the uttermost, with lung, and sinew, and every organ taxed to utmost tension, I most certainly beat any previous record in swimming that I had ever attained. Miranda, with apparently but little effort, kept slightly ahead. The last few yards—shorter than the actual distance—appeared to divide us from the huge form of the monster now distinctly visible beneath the water, when with one frantic yell and a dash at the oars, which took every remaining pound of strength out of the willing crew, the boat shot up within equal distance. At a signal from the captain every

oar was raised and brought down again with a terrific splash into the water, and a simultaneous yell. The effort was successful. The huge creature, strangely timid in some respects, stopped, and with one powerful side motion of fins and tail glided out of the line of pursuit. At the same moment the boat swept up, and eager arms lifted Miranda and her burden into it. My hand was on the gunwale until I saw her safe, whence with a slight amount of assistance I gained the mid-thwart.

'Saved, thank God!' cried the captain, with fervent expression, 'but a mighty close thing. The next time you take a bath of this kind, my dear Miranda, with sharks around, you must let me know beforehand, eh?'

'Some one would have had to go, captain,' she answered; 'we couldn't see the dear little fellow drowned before our eyes. It was only a trifle after all—a swim

in smooth water on a fine day: I didn't reckon on a shark being so close, I must say.'

'I saw the naughty shark,' said the little fellow, now quite recovered and in his usual spirits. 'How close he came! Do you think he would have eaten us all, captain?'

'Yes, my boy—without salt; you would never have seen your papa and mamma again if it had not been for this lady here.'

'But you took us in the boat, captain,' argued the little fellow; 'he can't catch us in here, can he?'

'But the lady caught you in her arms long before the boat came up, my dear, or else you would have been drowned over and over again; that confounded tackle caught, or else we should have been up long before. It's a good thing they were not lowering for a whale, or my first mate's language would have been something to remember till the

voyage after next. However, here we are all safe, Charlie, and there's your mother looking out for you.'

A painfully eager face was that which gazed from the vessel as we rowed alongside. Every trace of the languor partly born of the tropic sun and partly of aristocratic *morgue* was gone from the countenance of Mrs. Percival, as her boy, laughing and prattling, was carried up the rope ladder and lifted on deck. His mother clasped him now passionately in her arms, sobbing, blessing, kissing him, and crying aloud that God had restored her child from the dead. 'Oh, my boy! my boy!' she repeated again and again; 'your mother would have died too, if you had been drowned, she would never have lived without you.'

By this time Miranda had reached the deck, where she was received with a hearty British cheer from the ship's company, while

the passengers crowded around her as if she had acquired a new character in their eyes. But Mrs. Percival surpassed them all; kneeling before Miranda she bowed herself to the deck, as if in adoration, and kissed her wet feet again and again.

'You have saved my child from a terrible death at the risk of your own and your husband's lives,' she said. 'May God forget me if I forget your noble act this day! I have been proud and unkind in my manner to you, my dear. I humble myself at your feet, and implore your pardon. But henceforth, Miranda Telfer, you and I are sisters. If I do not do something in requital it will go hard with me and Charlie.'

'Now, my dear Sybil,' interposed the husband, 'do you observe that Mrs. Telfer has not had time to change her dress—very wet it seems to be—and I suppose Master Charlie will be none the worse for being put

to bed and well scolded, the young rascal. Come, my dear.'

Colonel Percival, doubtless, felt a world of joy and relief when the light of his eyes and the joy of his heart stood safe and sound on the deck of the *Florentia* again, but it is not the wont of the British aristocrat to give vent to his emotions, even the holiest, in public. The veil of indifference is thrown over them, and men may but guess at the volcanic forces at work below that studiously calm exterior.

So, laying his hand gently but firmly on his wife's arm, he led her to her cabin, with her boy still clasped in her arms as if she yet feared to lose him, and they disappeared from our eyes. As for Miranda and myself, such immersions had been daily matters of course, and were regarded as altogether too trifling occurrences to require more than the necessary changes of clothing.

We both appeared in our places at the next meal, when Miranda was besieged with questions as to her sensations, mingled with praises of her courage and endurance in that hour of deadly peril.

'And *her* child, too,' said Mrs. Craven; 'what a lesson of humility it ought to teach her! Had you, my dear girl, been swayed by any of the meaner motives which actuate men and women, her foolish pride might have cost her child's life.'

'Oh, surely no one *could* have had such thoughts when that dear little boy fell overboard! I couldn't help Mrs. Percival not liking me. I really did not think much about it; but when I saw the poor little face in the sea, more startled, indeed, than frightened, I felt as if I must go in after him. It was quite a matter of course.'

After this incident it may be believed that we were indeed a happy family on board the

Florentia. Every one vied with every one else in exhibiting respect and admiration towards Miranda. Mrs. Percival would not hear of a refusal that we should come and stay with her, when we had done all that was proper and dutiful in the family home. Miss Vavasour and Mrs. Craven depended on me to show them all the beauties of Sydney harbour; while Captain Carryall pledged himself to place Mr. Frankston's yacht at the service of his passengers generally, and to render them competent to champion the much-vaunted glories of the unrivalled harbour to all friends, foes, and doubters on the other side of the world.

Colonel Percival privately interrogated the captain as to the nature of the commercial undertaking in which he was about to arrange a partnership for me, and begged as a favour, being a man of ample means, that he might be permitted to advance the

amount of my share. The captain solemnly promised him that if there was any difficulty in the proposed arrangement on account of my deficiency of cash he should be requested to supply it. 'He seemed to feel easy in his mind after I told him this, my boy,' said the commander, with that mixture of simplicity and astuteness which distinguished him, 'but fancy old Paul and your father admitting outside capital in one of their trade ventures!'

. . . . .

'This time to-morrow we shall be going through Sydney Heads,' said the first mate to me as we walked the deck about an hour after sunrise one morning, 'that is, if the wind holds.'

'Pray Heaven it may,' said I; 'then we shall have a view of the harbour and city worth seeing. It makes all the difference. We might have a cloudy day, or be tacking

about till nightfall, and the whole effect would be lost.' I was most anxious not only that Miranda's first sight of my native land and her future home should impress her favourably, but I was naturally concerned that our friends should not suppose that the descriptions of the Queen City of the South, with which the captain and I had regaled them, were overdrawn. We sat late at supper that night talking over the wonderful events and experiences that were to occur on the morrow. Plans were discussed, probable residence and inland travel calculated, the Fish River caves and the Blue Mountains were, of course, to be visited—all kinds of expeditions and slightly incongruous journeys to be carried out.

Colonel and Mrs. Percival had been asked to stay at Government House during their visit, which was comparatively short; while Mr. and Mrs. Craven and Miss Vava-

sour were to go primarily to Petty's Hotel, which had been highly recommended; and the gentlemen had intimation that they would receive notices of their being admitted as honorary members of the Australian and Union Clubs. With such cheerful expectations and forecasts we parted for the night.

The winds were kind. 'The breeze stuck to us,' as the mate expressed it, and about an hour after the time he had mentioned we were within a mile of the towering sandstone portals of that erstwhile strange, silent harbour into which the gallant seaman Cook, old England's typical mariner, had sailed a hundred years ago.

I had been on deck since dawn. Now that we were so near the home of my childhood, the thoughts of old days, and the parents, brothers, sisters, from whom I had been so long separated, rushed into my mind, until I felt almost suffocated with contending

emotions. How would they receive us? Would they be prepared to see me a married man? Would their welcome to Miranda be warm or formal? I began to foresee difficulties—even dangers of family disruption—consequences which before had never entered into the calculation.

However, for the present these serious reflections were put to flight by expressions of delight from the whole body of passengers, headed by Miranda, who then came on deck. By this time the good ship *Florentia* had closely approached the comparatively narrow entrance, the frowning buttresses of sandstone, against which the waves, now dashed with hoarse and angry murmur, rose almost above us, while a long line of surges, lit up by the red dawn fires, menaced us on either hand.

'Oh, what a lovely entrance!' said Miss Vavasour, after gazing long and earnestly at

the scene. 'It seems like the gate of an enchanted lake. What magnificent rock-masses, and what light and colour the sun brings out! It is something like a sun—warm, glowing, irradiating everything even at this early hour—and what a sky! The dream tone of a painter! I congratulate you, you dear darling Miranda, and you, Mr. Telfer, on having such a day for home-coming. It is a good omen—I am sure it must be. Nothing but good could happen on such a glorious day.'

The day is perfection, but more than one good ship coming through this entrance at night has mistaken the indentation on the other side of the South Head for the true passage, and gone to pieces on the rocks below that promontory. But, at any rate, *we* are now safely inside; and where is there a harbour in the world to match it?

As we passed Middle harbour and drew

slowly up the great waterway, which affords perhaps more deep anchorage than any other in the world, the ladies were loud in their expressions of admiration. 'Look at those sweet white houses on the shores of the pretty little bays!' said Mrs. Craven; 'and what lovely gardens and terraces stretching down to the beaches!'

'And there is a Norfolk Island pine, one —two—ever so many,' cried Miranda. 'I did not think *they* grew here; I am sure now that I shall be happy.'

'Yes, of course!' said Miss Vavasour, 'what is to hinder you? And you are to live in one of those pretty cream-coloured cottages—what lovely stone it must be!—with a garden just like that one on the point, and a boat-house and a jetty. One of those little steamers that I see fussing about will land Mr. Telfer, when he returns from the city, or you can get into that little boat that

lies moored below, and row across the bay for him.'

Miranda's eyes filled as she glanced at the pretty villas and more pretentious mansions, past which we glided, some half-covered with climbers, or buried amid tropical shrubs of wild luxuriance. Her heart was too deeply stirred for jesting at that moment. She could only press her friend's hand and smile, as if pleading for a less humorous view of so important a subject.

The harbour itself was full of interest to the strangers. Vessels of all sizes and shapes—coasters, colliers, passenger-boats, yachts, and steam launches—passed and re-passed in endless succession. Two men-of-war lay peacefully at anchor in Farm Cove, a Messagerie steamer in the stream, while a huge P. and O. mail-boat outward bound moved majestically towards the Heads through which we had so recently entered.

We had just cleared Point Piper, where I remember spending the joyous holidays of long ago with my schoolmates, the sons of the fine old English gentleman who then dwelt there, when a sailing boat sped swiftly towards us, in which stood a stout, middle-aged man waving his hat frantically.

'I believe that is Paul Frankston himself come to overhaul us,' said the captain, raising his glass. 'He's sailor enough to recognise the rig of the *Florentia*, and if we had been a little nearer his bay, he'd have wanted us to stop the ship and lunch with him in a body. As it is, I feel sure he'll capture some of the party.'

'What splendid hospitality!' said Mrs. Percival. 'Is that sort of thing usual here? You must be something like us Indians in your ways.'

'There is a good deal of likeness, I think,' said the captain. 'I suppose the

heat accounts for it. It's too hot to refuse, most of the year. But here comes Paul!'

The sailing boat by this time had run alongside and doused her sail, while one of the crew held on to a rope thrown to him, as the owner presented himself on deck with more agility than might have been expected from a man of his age.

'Well, Charley, my boy, so you're in at last—thought you were lost, or had run away and sold the ship, ha, ha! What sort of a voyage have you had? Passengers, too—pray introduce me. Is there anything I can do for them in Sydney? Must be something. Perhaps I shall hear by and by. Who's this youngster?

'No! surely not the son of my old friend, Captain Telfer? Now I remember the boy that ran away to the islands, or would have done so, if they hadn't let him go. Quite right; I ran away myself, and a fine time I

had there. I must tell you what happened to me there once, eh, Charley?'

Here the old gentleman began to laugh so heartily that he was forced to suspend his narration, while the captain regarded him with an expression which conveyed a slight look of warning. 'But I am forgetting. By the way, Charley, have you any curios in your cabin?' The captain nodded, and the two old friends disappeared down the companion. Only, however, to reappear in a very few minutes, which we employed in favourable criticism.

'What a fine hearty old gentleman!' said Mrs. Craven. 'Any one can see that he is an Englishman by his figure and the way he talks; though I suppose colonists are not so very different.'

'Mr. Frankston has been a good deal about the world,' I said. 'But he was born in Sydney, and has spent the greater part

of his life near this very spot. He was at sea in his earlier years, but has been on shore since he married. He is now a wealthy man, and one of the leading Sydney merchants.'

'One would think he was a sea captain now,' said Miss Vavasour. 'He looks quite as much like one as a merchant; but I suppose every one can sail a boat here.'

'You are quite right, Miss Vavasour. Every one who is born in Sydney learns to swim and sail a boat as soon as possible after he can walk. There is no place in the world where there are so many yachtsmen. On holidays you may see doctors, lawyers, clergymen, even judges, sailing their boats — doing a good deal of their own work in the "able seaman" line; and, to tell truth, looking occasionally much more like pirates than sober professional men.'

About this time Mr. Frankston re-

appeared, carrying in his hand a couple of grass-er-garments, which he appeared to look upon as very precious. 'These are for my little girl,' he said; 'she has just come down from the bush with her husband to spend the hot months with her old father. It will give her the greatest pleasure to see these ladies and their husbands at Marahmee, next Saturday, when we can have a little picnic in the harbour and a sail in my yacht, the *Sea-gull*. The captain will tell you that I am to be trusted with a lively boat still.'

'I never wish to go to sea with a better sailor,' said the captain; 'and if our friends have no other engagements, I can promise them a delightful day and a view of some of the finest scenery south of the line.'

Barring unforeseen or indispensable engagements every one promised to go. Mr. Frankston averred that they had done him a great—an important service. He was

getting quite hipped—he was indeed—when his daughter luckily recognised the *Florentia* coming up the harbour. She is a sailor's daughter, you know—has an eye for a ship—and started him off to meet his old friend Captain Carryall, and secure him for dinner. Now he felt quite another man, and would say good-bye. Before leaving he must have a word with his young friend.

'My dear boy,' said he, laying his hand on my shoulder, 'I have known your father ever so many years. We were younger men then, and saw something of each other in more than one bit of fun; and at least one or two very queer bits of fighting in the Bay of Islands; so that we know each other pretty well. I've heard what Carryall has to say about you and your charming wife. I think we shall be able to "fix up," as our American friends say, our little mercantile arrangement very neatly. But

that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. You've been away a good while, so many years, we'll say.'

'I have indeed,' I replied.

'Well—you've grown from a boy into a man, and a devilish fine one too.' Here the dear old chap patted me on the back and looked up at my face, a great deal higher up than his. 'Well, naturally, you've changed. So have your people, your young brothers and sisters have turned into men and women while you've been away. And then again, another change—a great one too—you're married.'

'Yes! thank God I am.'

'I am sure you have good reason, my boy. But my idea is this, people—the best of people—don't like surprises,—even one's own friends. Now, what I want you to do is to bring your wife and come and stay at Marahmee for a week, while they're

getting your rooms ready for you at North Shore. There's nobody there now but Antonia and her husband. It wants another pair of young people to enliven the place a bit. And Charley Carryall will go over and tell them all about you and your pretty Miranda, while you and I settle our partnership affairs.'

I could see how it was; our good old friend, with a kindness and delicacy of feeling which I have rarely seen equalled, had all along made up his mind that Miranda and I should begin our Sydney experiences with a visit to his hospitable mansion. After a talk with the captain, for which purpose he had feigned an interest in South Sea 'curios,' they had come to the conclusion that it would be more prudent that the family should have a few days to accustom themselves to the idea of my marriage. In the meantime his daughter, Mrs. Neuchamp,

would be able to give Miranda the benefit of her experience as a Sydney matron of some years' standing, and to ensure that she made her introduction under favourable circumstances.

Miranda, naturally nervous at the idea of then and there making her appearance among a group of relatives wholly unknown to her, was much relieved at the delay thus granted, and cheerfully acceded to the proposed arrangement.

'That being all settled, I'll get home and have everything ready for you when you arrive. The captain will take care of you. He knows the road out, eh, Charley? night or day; so good-bye till dinner time. Seven o'clock sharp.'

Still talking, Mr. Frankston descended to his boat, and making a long board, proceeded to beat down the harbour on his homeward voyage, waving his handkerchief

at intervals until he rounded a point and was lost to our gaze.

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It was not very long after this interview that we found ourselves in our berth at the Circular Quay, where, unlike Melbourne and some other ports, nothing more was needed for disembarkation but to step on shore into the city. Our good comrades of so many days were carried off in cabs to their destinations, with the exception of the Percivals, who, having been invited to Government House, found an aide-de-camp and the viceregal carriage awaiting them on the wharf. At such a time there is always a certain amount of fuss and anxiety with reference to luggage, rendering farewells occasionally less sentimental than might have been expected from the character of marine friendships. But it was not so in our experience. Miss Vavasour and

Mrs. Craven exchanged touching farewells with Miranda, mingled with solemn promises to meet at given dates—to write—to do all sorts of things necessary for their keeping up the flame of friendship. Then at the last moment Colonel and Mrs. Percival came up. 'My dearest Miranda,' said this lady, 'don't forget that you are my sister, not in word only. Put me to the proof whenever you need a sister's aid, and it shall always be at your service. Kiss Auntie Miranda, Charlie darling, and tell her you will always love her.'

'She picked me up out of the sea, when the naughty shark was going to eat us all. She's a good auntie, isn't she, mother?' said the little chap, responding readily 'Good-bye, Auntie Miranda.'

'I am not a man of many words, Mrs. Telfer!' said the colonel; 'but if I can be of service to you, now or at any future time,

I shall be offended if you do not let me know.' And then the stern soldier shook my hand in a way which gave double meaning to the pledge.

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It was yet early in the day, and the captain had duties to attend to which would keep him employed until the evening. 'I've ordered a carriage at six,' he said, 'when we'll start for Marahmee, which is about half an hour's drive. Until that time you can go ashore if you like; the Botanical Gardens are just round that point, or walk down George Street, or in any other way amuse yourselves. Meanwhile, consider yourselves at home also.'

'I think we'll stay at home then, captain, for the present,' said Miranda, 'and watch the people on shore. You have no idea how they interest me. Everything is so new. Remember that

I have never seen a carriage in my life before, or a cab, or a soldier; there goes one now—isn't he beautiful to behold? I shall sit here and make Hilary tell me the names of all the specimens as they come into view.'

'That will do capitally,' said the captain. 'I might have known that you could amuse yourself without help from any one.'

The time passed quickly enough, with the aid of lunch. The decks were cleared by six o'clock, by which time we were ready for the hired barouche when it drove up.

Miranda and I had employed our time so well that she had learnt the names of various types of character, and many products of civilisation, of which she had been before necessarily ignorant, except from books. 'It is a perfect object lesson,' she said. 'How delightful it is to be able to see the things and people that I have only

read about! I feel like those people in the *Arabian Nights* who had been all their lives in a glass tower on a desert island. Not that our dear Norfolk Island was a desert—very far from it. And now I am going to the first grand house I ever saw, and to live in it—more wonderful still. I feel like a princess in a fairy tale,' she went on, as she smilingly skipped into the carriage. 'Everything seems so unreal. Do you think this will turn into a pumpkin, drawn by mice, like poor Cinderella's? Hers was a chariot, though. What is a chariot?'

'I remember riding in one when I was a small boy,' I answered; 'and, by the same token, I had caught a number of locusts, and put them into my hat. I was invited to uncover, as the day was warm. When I did so, the locusts flew all about the closed-up carriage and into everybody's face. But chariots are old-fashioned now.'

Onward we passed along the South Head road, while below us lay the harbour with its multitudinous bays, inlets, promontories, and green knolls, in so many instances crowned with white-walled gardens, surrounding villas and mansions, all built of pale-hued, delicately-toned sandstone.

'Oh, what a lovely, delicious bay!' cried Miranda; 'and these are the Heads, where we came in. Good-bye, old ocean, playfellow of my childhood; farewell, wind of the sea, for a while. But I shall live near you still, and hear you in my dreams. I should die—I should feel suffocated—if nothing but woods and forests were to be seen.'

'If you don't die until you can't see the ocean, or feel the winds about here, you will live a long time, my dear,' said the captain. 'I don't know a more sea-going population anywhere than this Sydney one. Half the people you meet here have been

a voyage; and the boys take to a boat as the bush lads do to a horse. But here we are at the Marahmee gates, and there's my pet Antonia on the verandah ready to receive us.'

As we drove up the avenue, which was not very long, a very pretty, graceful young woman came swiftly to meet us. I knew this must be Mrs. Neuchamp, formerly Antonia Frankston, the old man's only child. She was not grown up when I left Sydney, and I heard that she had lately married a young Englishman, who had come out with letters of introduction to Mr. Frankston. We had seen each other last, as boy and girl, long years ago.

'Well, Captain Charley,' she said, making as though she would have embraced the skipper, 'what do you mean by being so long away? We began to think that you were lost—that the *Florentia* had run on

a reef—all sorts of things—been cut off by the islanders, perhaps. But now you *are* back with all sorts of island stories to tell dad, and a few curios for me. And you are Mrs. Telfer! Papa has told me all about you—his latest admiration, evidently. But you mustn't get melancholy when he deserts you; he is a passionate adorer while it lasts, but is always carried away by the next fresh face, generally a complete contrast to the last. I am sure we shall be great friends. I used to dance with your husband when we were children. Do you remember that party at Mrs. Morton's? You have grown considerably since then, and so handsome, too, I suppose I may say—now we are all married—no wonder Miranda fell in love with you. You're to call me Antonia, my dear; and now come upstairs, and I'll show you your rooms, which I have been getting

ready all the morning. Papa and Ernest will be here in a few minutes.'

'Mrs. Neuchamp evidently takes after her father,' I said, 'who can say more kind things in fewer minutes than any one I ever knew—and do them, too, which is more to the purpose. I am so glad that Miranda has had the chance of making her acquaintance before she sees many other people.'

'She is a dear, good, unselfish girl,' said the captain, 'and was always the same from a child, when she used to sit on my knee in this very verandah, and get me to tell her the names of the ships. I never saw a child so thoughtful for other people, always wondering what she could do for them; she is just the same to this day. She will be an invaluable friend for our Miranda, I foresee. She can give her all sorts of hints about housekeeping, and I've no doubt one or two about dress and the minor society matters. Not

that Miranda wants much teaching in that or any other way. Nature made her a lady, and gave her the look of a sea princess, and nothing could alter her.'

'Did you ever hear of a handsome young woman being spoiled by flattery, captain?' I said. 'I don't want to anticipate such a disaster, but it strikes me that if you are all going to be so very complimentary, I shall have to go on the other tack to keep the compass level.'

'There are dispositions that flattery falls harmless from,' said the captain solemnly; 'there are women that cannot be spoiled,—not so many, perhaps, but you have got one of them, Antonia is another. They will make a good pair, and I'll back them to do their duty and keep a straight course, fair weather or foul, against any two, married or single, that I ever saw, and I've seen a good many women in my time. But now we had better

be ready for dinner, for old Paul and Mr. Neuchamp will be here directly.'

They were not long in making their appearance, and a very merry dinner it was. Mr. Frankston wanted to hear all about the islands, and Mrs. Neuchamp was much interested in Captain Hayston, and thought he resembled one of the buccaneers of the Spanish Main, for whom she had a sentimental admiration in her girlhood.

'What a pity that all the romantic and picturesque people should be so wicked!' she asked. 'How is it, and what law of nature can it be that arranges that so many good and worthy people are so deadly uninteresting?'

'Antonia is not quite in earnest, my dear Mrs. Telfer!' said Mr. Neuchamp, remarking Miranda's wondering look; 'she knows well that it is more difficult to live up to a high ideal than to fall below it. There is a false glamour about men like Hayston, I

admit, by which people who are swayed by feeling rather than reason are often attracted.'

'I am afraid that Captain Hayston was a wicked man,' said Miranda, 'though I can't get Hilary to tell me much about him. However, there were very different accounts, some describing him as being generous and heroic, and others as cruel and unprincipled.'

'Whatever he was, there was no doubt about his being a sailor every inch of him,' said Captain Charley. 'I saw him handle his ship in a gale of wind through a dangerous channel, and I never forgot it.'

'I suppose he had his faults like the rest of us,' said Mr. Frankston, who did not seem inclined to pursue the subject. 'Never mind, when Frankston, Telfer, and Co. get the control of the South Sea Island trade, there won't be any room for dashing filibusters, will there, Charley?'

'I hope not; his day is over,' said the

captain. 'I am sorry for him, too, for he was one of the grandest men and finest seamen God Almighty ever permitted to sail upon His ocean. Under a different star he might have been an ornament to the service and an honour to his country.'

After dinner we all sat out on the broad verandah, where we lighted our cigars, and enjoyed the view over the sleeping waters of the bay. It was a glorious night, undimmed by mist or cloud. The harbour lights flamed brightly, anear and afar, while steamers passing to the different points of the endless harbourage lighted up the glittering plain with their variegated lamps, as if an operatic effect were intended.

'What a wondrous sight!' said Miranda. 'It certainly is a scene of enchantment, though it loses some of its beauty in my eyes from being so restless and exciting. There is no solitude; all is motion and

effort, as is the city by day. Our sea-view is as still and silent as if our island had just been discovered. It lends an air of solemnity to the night which this brilliant, many-coloured vision seems to want.'

'Antonia and I enjoy this sort of thing thoroughly,' said Mr. Neuchamp; 'our country is hot and dry as the summer comes on, and the glare is something to remember. But I must say I prefer the winter of the interior. The nights are heavenly, the mid-day warm without being oppressive, and the mornings are delightfully cool and bracing.'

'As weather it is as nearly perfect as it can be,' assented Mrs. Neuchamp, backing up her husband. 'Then the rides and drives on the firm sandy turf and the delightful natural roads! It's nice to think you can drive thirty or forty miles in any direction without going off your own run. Miranda must come and stay with me for a month or

two when you get settled, Mr. Telfer. We must see if she can't be persuaded to leave the seaside for a while.'

'We'll make up a party,' said Mr. Frankston; 'it's a long time since I have seen any station life. I had half a mind to try squatting once myself. But I'm like Miranda—I don't sleep well unless I can hear the surge in the night; but for a month or two, in May or June, it would be great fun, and do us all good, I expect.'

'Yes, my dear dad,' said his daughter, patting his shoulder, 'think of the riding and driving. You're not too old to ride, you know. I'll lend you Osmond—he's my horse now, and he's a pearl of hackneys. I'll ride out with you, and Ernest can take Miranda and Courtenay in the four-in-hand drag.'

'Well, that's a bargain, my dear!' said her father. 'When the summer is over and the autumn has nearly come to an end, and

the nights and mornings are growing fresh and crisp, that's the time to see the interior at its best. I haven't forgotten the feel of a bush-morning at sunrise; there's something very exhilarating about it.'

'Is there not?' replied Mrs. Neuchamp, '"as you see the vision splendid, of the sunlit plains extended," an ocean of verdure. You trace the river by the heavy timber on its banks, and the slowly-rising mists along its course. Then the sun, a crimson and gold shield against the cloudless azure, the cattle low in the great river meadows, you hear the crack of a stockwhip as the horses come galloping in like a regiment of cavalry, and the day has begun. It seems like a new world awakening to life.'

'I know a young woman,' said her husband, 'whose "inward eye" by no means made "the bliss of solitude" when she first went into the bush.'

'That was because I was newly married —torn away from my childhood's home, and all that,' laughed his wife. 'Besides, you used to stay away unconscionably long sometimes; now everything looks different. You will have to pass through that stage, my dear Miranda. So prepare yourself.'

'I am sure Hilary will never stay away from our home unless he is obliged; and then I must sew and sing till he comes back, like my countrywomen at Norfolk Island and Pitcairn when their men are at sea.'

'A very good custom, too,' said Paul. 'That reminds me that we must have some music to-night. Antonia will lead the way, and our cigars will taste all the better in the verandah.'

Mrs. Neuchamp had a fine voice and a fine ear. She had been well taught, and played her own accompaniments, while she

sang several favourite songs of her father's, and a duet with her husband.

'Now, it's your turn, Miranda,' said Mr. Frankston. 'I've heard all about you from the captain.'

'I shall be very glad to sing,' she answered, seating herself at the piano, 'if you care for my simple songs. I have always been fond of music, but our poor little harmonium was, for a long time, my only instrument. What shall I sing?'

'Sing the "Lament of Susannah M'Coy for her drowned lover,"' said the captain; 'that was a song brought from Pitcairn, wasn't it? I always liked it the best of all the island sing songs.'

'It is simple,' replied Miranda, 'but it is true; I believe the poor girl used to sit by the sea-shore singing it at night, and died of grief a year afterwards.'

She struck a few chords on the grand

Erard piano, and commenced a wailing, dirge-like melody, 'a long, low island song,' inexpressibly mournful. The movement was chiefly low-toned, and in the minor key, but at times it rose to a higher pitch, into which was thrown the agonized sorrow of irrevocable love, the endless regret, the void immeasurable and eternal, the hopeless despair of a desolated existence.

The words were simple, and more in recitative than rhythm. There was a certain monotony and repetition, but as an expression of passionate and hopeless sorrow it was strangely complete.

The tale was old as life and death, as love and joy, hope and despair. The maiden watching and waiting, during the voyage of the whale-ship, the year long through. The sudden delight of the vessel being sighted; the boats going off; the intensity of the anxiety; the returning crew; the eager

scanning of the passengers; the refusal to believe in mischance; the guarded half-told tale, then the unmistakable word of doom! *He had been drowned at sea;* the fearless, fortunate harpooner had, in the sudden flurry of the death-stricken whale, been thrown overboard and stunned. When the half-capsized boat was righted, Johnnie Mills was missing! They rowed round and round, all vainly, then sadly returned to the vessel. This was the tale they had to tell, the tale Susannah M'Coy had to hear. Her overwrought feelings found relief in the 'Maiden's Lament,' and after her death her girl companions in singing it preserved the memory of the maiden and her lover, of his doom and her unhappy fate.

There was nothing unusually melodious in the song itself, but as the low, rich notes of Miranda's voice struck on the ear of the listeners, those who had not heard before

seemed spell-bound. Not a motion was made, not a sound escaped them, as they listened with an intentness which said far more than the ready and general praise at its close. Knowing, as I did, the extraordinary quality of her voice, I had expected that some such effect would be produced, but I hardly reckoned on such complete and universal admiration.

When the cry of the heart-broken girl rose and echoed through the large room, the effect was electrical; the higher notes were sweet and clear, without a suspicion of hardness, and yet had wondrous under-tones of tears, such as I never heard in another woman's voice. Long before the wailing notes had faded into nothingness Mrs. Neuchamp's eyes were wet, while old Paul, Mr. Neuchamp, and the captain seemed in no great hurry to express their approval.

'That's the most wonderful song I ever heard,' said the old man. 'I've heard the girls in Nukuheva sing one something like it, and there are notes in Miranda's voice that take me back to my youth, the island days, and the good old times when Paul Frankston was young and foolish. God's blessing on them! Miranda, my dear, take an old man's thanks. I foresee that I shall have two daughters: one at Marahmee in the summer, and the other in the winter, when Antonia is in the bush.'

After this no one would hear of her leaving off. She sang other songs which were not all sorrowful. Some had a livelier tone, and the transient gleam which lit up the dark eyes told that mirth had its due place in her rich and many-sided nature.

'Would you like to hear one of our hymns now?' she asked, with the simplicity of a child. 'We used to sing them in parts, and

many a night when the moon was at the full did we sit on the beach and sing for hours. I can hear the surge now, and it puts me in mind of our dear old home.'

'Oh, by all means,' said Antonia; and without further prelude, she began a well-known hymn, the deep tones of her voice rising and falling as if in a cathedral, while the organ-like chords which she evoked from the Erard favoured the faultless rendering. We involuntarily joined in, and I saw Antonia looking admiringly at the singer, as with head upraised, and all the fervour of a mediæval penitent, she poured forth a volume of melodious adoration.

All were silent for some seconds after the last cadence had died away. At length the pause was broken by Antonia.

'After that lovely hymn, my dear Miranda, let me first thank you warmly for the pleasure you have given us all, and then suggest that

we retire. The gentlemen may stay and smoke a while longer, but this has been an exciting day for us, and you require rest. Besides, you have to make acquaintance with your new relations.'

'A sensible suggestion, my darling,' said Mr. Frankston. 'So we'll say good-night to Mrs. Telfer and yourself. We must have one more cigar in the verandah while we think over that great song of hers.'

. . . . .

It was arranged between Mr. Frankston and the captain that I should take my bride to my old home on the morning after next, and present her to my family. It might have been thought that, after so long an absence from my parents, it would have been more in keeping with filial duty to have rushed off at once, and, in a manner, cast myself at their feet like the prodigal. But that unlucky yet eventually fortunate younger son did not

bring a wife with him, in which case the paternal welcome might have been less distinct. I had put myself in the hands of my more experienced friends, who, as men of the world, knew the value of first impressions.

'You and Miranda will be all the better for a day's rest, and a little cheering up at Marahmee,' had said the captain. 'Antonia, too, will see that your sea princess is properly turned out, and fit to bear inspection by the ladies of the family. *They* won't have much to criticise, I'll be bound. I'm an early man, so I'll go and breakfast with your father, and give him a general idea of your doings and prospects. You had better turn up about mid-day. It will be high tide then, and Miranda will see Isola Bella at its best. Come on board the *Florentia* first, and I'll send you over in proper style.'

Acting upon this prudent advice, Miranda and I alighted from the Marahmee carriage

at the circular quay, and once more set foot on board the *Florentia*, where we found the captain ready to receive us. He made us come down into the cuddy and partake of fruit and wine (that is, Miranda took the first and I the latter), while he gave us a sketch of his interview with my father.

CHAPTER XVII

'OUR JACK'S COME HOME TO-DAY'

'THE old skipper was walking in the garden, glass in hand. I knew I should find him up, though it was soon after sunrise. No fear of *his* being in bed and the sun up. "Hallo! Carryall," he said, "I was just thinking about you; thought I could make out the *Florentia* yesterday. What sort of a voyage have you had, and what luck among the right whales?"

'"Pretty fair. Rather longer out than I expected, but didn't do badly, after all; had some trading among the islands; cocoa-nut oil has gone up, and the copra I got will pay handsomely."

'"That's good news," he said; "and look here, Carryall, my boy, I've been thinking lately that a very paying business might be put together by going in regularly for island trading. They're ready and willing to take our goods, and their raw material—oil, copra, fruit, ever so many things that they are only too glad to sell—would pay a handsome percentage on the outlay. What is wanted is a partner here with capital, a few ships to go regularly round the islands, and a manager who knows the language and understands the natives. If I were a little younger, by Jove! I'd go into it myself. You'll stay and breakfast with us of course. We're not late people. By the by, you haven't heard of my boy in your travels, have you?"

'"Well I *have* heard of him, and——"

'"Heard of him!" he said, not giving me time to get further; "where? what was he doing?"

'"Well, he was supercargo on board the *Leonora*—Hayston's brig. They had been at Ocean Island just before me."

'"Hayston, Bully Hayston?" the old man said, looking stern. "I'm sorry he was mixed up with that fellow. A fine seaman, but a d—d scoundrel, from all I've heard of him; what were they doing there? However, I know young fellows must buy their experience. Perhaps he's left him by this time."

'"The *Leonora* was wrecked in Chabral harbour," I said, "and her bones lie on the coral reef there. She'll never float again."

'"Ha! and did Hilary get off safe? I suppose it was a heavy gale. Heard anything of him since?"

'"He stayed at Moūt for some time," I said, "and then was lucky enough to get a passage to Sydney in the *Rosario*, but he left her at Norfolk Island."

'"Left her—left her—why the devil didn't

he come on in her, and see his old father, and mother, and sisters? Hang the fellow, has he no natural feeling? Here have we been wearing our hearts out with anxiety all these years, and his poor mother having a presentiment (as she calls it) that he's drowned or sold into slavery, or something, and d--n me, sir! the young rascal goes and stays to have a picnic at Norfolk Island! The next thing we'll hear, I suppose, is that he's married one of these Pitcairn Island girls. Not but what he might do worse, for I never saw such a lot of fine-looking lasses in my life, as I did the last time I was there; and as good as they are handsome, by George! But to stay there, so near home too! If I didn't know that he was a good boy, and as honest as the day, from his cradle upwards, I'd say he was an unnatural young—— But I won't miscall the lad. To stay there——"

'"But he didn't stay there, captain."

'"What!" he roared, "didn't stay there—went back to the islands, I suppose, to have a little more beach-combing and loafing? Why couldn't he have come home when he was so near? He *might* have thought of his poor mother, if he didn't give *me* credit for caring to see his face again."

'And here the old skipper frowned, and put on a terribly stern expression. "Why, he might have come home and married a wife, and settled down and been the comfort of our old age."

'"So he has!" I said; "that is, he is married, and he has come to Sydney."

'"Married? Come to Sydney? How can that be? Why isn't he here? Carryall, my boy, you wouldn't play a joke on an old man? No, sir! you wouldn't *dare* to do it. How *could* he come to Sydney and be married?"

'"He came with me in the *Florentia*," I

said, "and brought his wife with him." And here, Miranda, my dear, I told him what a very unpleasant young woman you were, and took about a quarter of an hour to do it; at the end of which narration the breakfast bell rang.

'"Come into the house, Carryall," he said, "and tell it all to his mother. I'll break it to her by saying that you bring news of Hilary, and that he's quite well, and so on, and likely to come home soon."

'So we went in. I shall never forget the look that came into your mother's eyes when the skipper said, "Here's Captain Carryall straight from the islands; he's brought you girls some shells and curios as usual, and better than that, news of Hilary."

'"News of my boy, my darling Hilary! Good news, I hope. Oh, Captain Carryall! say it's good. Oh! *where* is he, and what was he doing?"

'"It is good news, my dear lady," said I,

"or I should not have come over to tell you. I saw him quite lately as near Sydney as Norfolk Island."

'"Of course he was coming here—coming here; he would not have the heart to stay away from his poor father and mother any longer, when he was so near as that. And was he quite well? Oh! my boy—my precious Hilary! What would I not give if he were to come here and settle down for good?"

'"He is thinking of doing so," I said. "His fixed intention was to marry and live in Sydney for the rest of his days."

'"Thank God! thank God in His mercy!" she said, clasping her hands. "And do you think he will be here soon—how many weeks?"

'"It will not be a matter of weeks, but days; I know that he took his passage in a certain ship, and that you may expect him every hour."

'Then she looked keenly at me. Your mother is a clever woman. She began to think I had been leading her on.

'"You are not treating me as a child, Charles Carryall, are you? My son is here, and you have been afraid to tell me so. Is it not so?"

'"Only a harmless deception, my dear Mrs. Telfer. Your son and his wife came here in my vessel. They stayed at Paul Frankston's last night, and will be here at mid-day."

'The dear lady looked as if she could not realise it for a moment, then sat back in her chair, and raised her eyes as if in prayer.

'One of the girls moved as if to support her, but she waved her off. "No, my dear, you need not be afraid. I shall not faint; I have borne many things, and can bear this. I am returning thanks to our Almighty Father, who has restored my son to me. 'My son, who was lost, and is found.' My

son, who was dead to me, and is now restored to life. O God, most heartily and humbly do I thank Thee — most merciful — most loving!"

'After this we were a very happy party. The girls, of course, wanted to know all about Miranda here' — here my darling smiled, and took his hand; 'I dashed off a sketch, and some day you can ask Mariana and Elinor—both great friends of mine they are—if it is a good likeness.'

'I am afraid it was too good,' sighed Miranda, 'and they will be dreadfully disappointed.'

. . . . .

The end of it was that we left the *Florentia* at eight bells, in great state and majesty, in a whaleboat — upon which Miranda insisted, despising the captain's gig as a trumpery skiff—and a picked crew, with the skipper himself as the steer-oar.

'That's really something like,' she said, as she stepped lightly on to the thwart. 'If there was a little swell on, I should feel quite myself again, and think of the dear days when I was a happy little island girl, bare-footed and bare-headed, and thought going off to a strange vessel through the great, solemn, sweeping rollers the wildest enjoyment. But I am a happy girl now,' she added, with a look in her deep eyes which expressed a world of love and rich content; 'only the thought of learning to be a lady sometimes troubles me.'

'You will never need to do *that*,' I said.

'There is the house!' I cried; 'there's Isola Bella!' as we rounded a point, and a picturesque stone house came full into view. It had been built in the early days of the colony by an Imperial officer, long resident in Italy, and showed the period in its massive stone walls, Florentine façade, and

wide, paved verandah. The site was elevated above the lake-like waters of the bay, towards which a winding walk led, terminating in a massive stone pier, into which iron rings and stanchions had been let. The beach was white and smooth, though the tide ran high, and the wavelets rippled close to the pale sandstone rocks, which lent a tone of delicacy and purity to the foreshore.

The weather-stained walls of the house were half covered with climbers, a wilderness of tropical shrubs, and richly-blooming flower-thickets. There were glades interspersed, carpeted with the thick-swarded couch or 'doubh' grass, originally imported from India, and which, nourished by the coast showers, and delighting in a humid atmosphere, preserves its general freshness of colour the long Australian summer through.

I had been so preoccupied with speculations as to Miranda's reception by my family,

that my own emotions, on returning to my childhood's home, lay in abeyance. Now, however, at the near view of the house—the pier, the walled-in sea-bath—the scenes and adventures of my earliest youth came back with overwhelming force and clearness. There was the boat-house, into which I had paddled so many a time after nightfall, returning from fishing or sailing excursions. There was the flagstaff on which was displayed the Union Jack and other flags on great occasions. The old flag floated in the breeze to-day. I knew for what reason and celebration. I could see my mother, as of old, walking down to the pier to welcome and embrace, or to remonstrate and fondly chide when I had remained absent in stormy weather. How many fears and anxieties had I not caused to agitate that loving heart! And my stern and mostly silent parent—did I not once surprise him in scarce dignified sorrow

at my night-long absence and probable untimely decease. Yet all his words were, 'God forgive you, my boy, for the misery you have caused us this night.'

And now the years had passed—had flown rather, crowded as they were with incident—that had changed the heedless boy into the man,—matured, perhaps, by too early worldly knowledge, and the grim comradeship of danger and death. I had returned safely, bringing my sheaves with me in the guise of one dearer to me than life. I had, during the intervals of reflection I had lately enjoyed, repented fully of the unconsciously selfish sins of my youth, and was fixed in firm resolve to atone, so far as in me lay, by care and consideration in the future.

As we dashed alongside of the pier, the years rolled back, and as of old I saw my mother pacing the well-known path to the boat. She was followed by my father at a

short distance. I fancied that the dear form told of the lapse of time, in less firm step and the bent figure which age compels. My father was erect as ever, and his eye swept the far horizon of outer seas as of old; but surely his hair and beard were whiter.

Miranda's step was first upon the pier—she needed no help in leaving or entering a boat. Side by side we walked to meet my mother, who, with a sob of joy, folded me in her arms. 'My boy! my boy!' was all she could articulate for some moments; then, gently disengaging herself, 'and this is my new daughter?' she said. 'May God bless and keep you both, my children, and preserve for us the great happiness which His providence has ordained this day.'

'Well, neighbour!' in the well-remembered greeting which he affected, rang out here my father's clear tones, 'and so you have finished your cruise for a while! What

a man you have grown!' he exclaimed, as he looked upwards half-admiringly at my head and shoulders, markedly above his own. 'Filled out, bronzed, you look a sailor, man, all over.'

'And so you wouldn't give the Sydney girls a chance, and have brought a wife back with you for fear there mightn't be a "currency lass" to spare. I must say I admire your taste, my boy. No one can fault that. Welcome, my dear Miranda, to your own and your husband's home. Give your old father a kiss and the ceremony is complete.' Here the governor gravely embraced his new daughter, and then, holding her at arm's length, regarded her admiringly, till she playfully ran back to the girls. 'Charley here guarantees she is as good as she is handsome. He said better, indeed; but that's impossible. No woman with her looks could be better inside than out. So, Hilary, my

boy, I congratulate you on your choice. You've fallen on your feet in love and friendship both, according to what Carryall tells me of Paul Frankston's partnership arrangement. And now we'll come up to the house and drink the bride's health. I feel as if I needed a refresher after all this excitement. I little thought, when I saw Charley come over so early, what was in store for us, eh, mother?'

Before we reached the house the two girls, Mariana and Elinor, had taken possession of Miranda and carried her upstairs to the rooms which were to be allotted to us while we dwelt at Isola Bella. 'Now that the other boys are up the country,' said Mariana, who was the elder, 'we have more houseroom than we need. So, directly we heard that you were in Sydney, Elinor and I set to work and arranged these two rooms, so that you and Miranda should be quite independent. There's such a pretty view of

the harbour. You can use this one as a sitting-room, and there's a smaller dressing-room which he can make a den of. Men always like a place to be untidy in.'

'Oh, how nice it will be,' said Elinor, the younger one, whom I remember a curly-headed romp of ten when I left home, 'to have a mate for rowing and boat-sailing! Mariana here doesn't care for boats, and dislikes rough weather. I suppose no weather would frighten you. Oh, what lovely trips we shall have, and mother can't be nervous when you are with me.'

'I suppose you think Miranda is a sort of mermaid,' said I, now arrived and joining in the conversation, 'and impossible to be drowned. But what would become of me if anything happened to her? Do you think I can trust her with you? What a grand room! I remember it well in old days when it used to be the guest-chamber. I was only

allowed into it now and then, and always under inspection. I feel the promotion.'

'Now, we'll run away and leave you,' said Mariana. 'Lunch is nearly ready; you will hear the bell.'

We sat down on a couch and gazed into each other's eyes with clasped hands. The harbour, with its variously composed fleet, lay wide and diversified before us. Every conceivable vessel—barge, steamer, collier, skiff, yacht, and row-boat—made progress adown and across its waters. How fair a scene it was on this, one of the loveliest days which sun and sky and wavelets deep ever combined to fashion! After all my adventures by seas and lands—after all the sharp contrasts of my chequered life—now lotus-eating amid the groves or by the founts of an earthly paradise—now ignorant, from one day to another, of the hour when the death-knell would sound—now free and joyous, handsomely dressed, in

foreign seaports with ruffling swagger and chinking dollars — anon ragged, shoeless, shipwrecked, and forlorn—nay, starving, but for the charity of the soft-hearted heathens whom we in our pride are prone to despise.

And now I was at home again. Home! sweet home! in fullest sense of the word —welcomed, beloved, fêted! What had I done to deserve this love and trust now so profusely showered upon me? My better angel, too, my darling Miranda, by my side, sharing in all this wealth of affection. How could I have foretold that such good fortune would be mine, all unworthy that I felt myself, when, bruised and bleeding, I was hurled ashore in the midnight storm from the wrecked *Leonora?*—when I felt in thought the deadly shudder which ever follows the scratch of the poisoned arrow—when I sank to eternal rest (as I then supposed) beneath the surf-tormented shore of the island? How

had I jostled death, disease, danger in every form and shape,—and now, almost without thought or volition of my own, I was placed in possession of all those things for which through a long life so many men toil and struggle vainly and unsuccessfully.

'Thank God! thank God!' I exclaimed aloud involuntarily, for truly our hearts were filled in that hour of realised peace and happiness with grateful wonder.

'Let us give Him thanks,' whispered Miranda, 'who only has done this wondrous thing for us.'

. . . . .

Captain Carryall, my father, and Mr. Frankston were men of action—all through their lives the deed had followed quick on the resolve. Thus, within a week after our arrival, premises were purchased on the shore of the bay; stores and warehouses were planned, while upon an office in the

chief business centre of Sydney, at no great distance from Macquarie Square, a legend of the period presented the firm of 'Carryall, Telfer, and Company, South Sea merchants and purchasers of island produce.' This was the commencement, as it turned out, of a prosperous mercantile enterprise, ramifying in divers directions. It was arranged not only to purchase or to ship on commission the raw material so easily procurable, but to advance on whaling and trading ventures; the projectors, better equipped with experience than capital, being always willing to pay high interest, for which indeed the margin of profit amply provided. Here I was in my element, whether directing labourers, interviewing seamen, shouting in the vernacular to the native crews, or calculating the value of cargoes. My father came over every other day to watch me at my work, and of my style of management

he was pleased to express approval. 'You have not altogether wasted your time, my boy,' he said one day. 'The great thing in all these matters is energy. With that and reasonable experience a man is sure to be successful in a new country — indeed in any country. Pluck and perseverance mean everything in life. Never despair. You know our family motto — *Fortuna favet fortibus.* And you would smile if I told you how often in the history of my life a bold bid for fame or fortune has been my only resource.'

Whether I had exhibited the proverbial fortitude, or whether, indeed, the capricious goddess was mollified in my case, cannot with certainty be decided. The fact, however, was there, that our luck, from whatever cause, was in the ascendant, inasmuch as business of a profitable nature began to pour in upon us. The average gains beyond expenses

were so apparent that it was evident that before long we should be in a position to set up housekeeping on our own account.

In the meantime nothing could be more harmonious and satisfactory than our composite home life at Isola Bella, difficult as it is sometimes to arrange the housing of two families, however closely related, under one roof. The natural amiability of Miranda's nature fortunately prevented the slightest friction. Constitutionally anxious to please, it was the chief article of her simple faith to seek the happiness of others rather than her own. Prompt in compliance, eager to learn all minor matters with which she had been necessarily unacquainted, ready to join in the harmless mirth of the hour, or to tell of the wonders of her island home, she was, as all agreed, a constant source of interest and entertainment.

More than all, her pervading, fervent

religious faith endeared her to the pious heart of my dearest mother, in whose visits to the poor and in charitable ministrations she was by choice her constant companion; while her unfeigned pity for the half-fed, half-clothed children of the neglected classes with which every city abounds excited my mother's wonder and admiration.

'Your wife is a pearl of womanhood, my dear Hilary,' she would say to me. 'You are a good boy; I hope you are worthy of her. I can hardly think that any man could be. When you see the women so many men are fated to pass their lives with, you have indeed reason to be thankful.'

'So I am, my dear old mother,' I would say. 'Every day I feel minded to sing a song of joy and gratitude. I feel as life was a new discovery and creation. I am in a Paradise where no serpent that ever crawled has power to harm my Eve. I

feel sometimes as if there was an unreal perfection about it all, too bright to last.'

So indeed it appeared to me at that time. Fully employed as I was by day and in the exercise of all the faculties that my island life had served to train, it was impossible to overtask the health of mind and body in which I revelled. I was sensible, too, that the joint enterprise upon which I had embarked was growing and improving daily, while much of its success was attributed by Mr. Frankston and Captain Carryall to my management. At night, when I returned, there was one who never failed to catch sight of my skiff when half across the bay. Then our family evenings, cheered with song and harmless mirth, were truly restful after the labours of the day.

Our neighbours, too, with all the old friends of the family, seemed desirous to welcome the son of the house who had

been so long absent, and had wandered so far. Whether from curiosity, or a higher feeling, they were equally anxious to call upon 'the son's wife.' The positions, and dispositions, manners, and habitudes of the different types were well explained to Miranda by my socially-experienced sisters, so that she was saved from any mis-apprehension which might so easily have arisen.

Our friends the Neuchamps, too, were often with us, and made the greater part of our quiet recreations. On alternate Sundays nothing would content Mr. Frankston short of our all dining with him, to be sent back in his sailing-boat if the weather was favourable, or to remain for the night in the ample guest-chambers of Marahmee if otherwise.

Our Saturday afternoons, indeed, were almost entirely devoted to picnics and

cruises in his yacht, at which time he insisted upon Miranda steering, or, as he said, taking command, at which times he was always loud in admiration of her nautical skill—declaring, indeed, that she was fit to take charge of any vessel in Her Majesty's navy.

We had also seen a good deal of our fellow-passengers, Mr. and Miss Vavasour, who, after a first introduction, were always included in Mr. Frankston's Saturday picnic invitations. That lively damsel professed a great admiration for Mr. Frankston, who responded so promptly that Antonia reproached him for turning faithless to Miranda.

'It's his nature, he can't help it,' she said.

'But Miss Vavasour will have some day to suffer whatever pangs are supposed to fall to the lot of the deserted fair; then she will repent of her fascinations.'

'Not at all — sufficient for the day, you know. I begin to think that one's admirers ought to be past their first youth. They're more thoroughly appreciative. "On his frank features middle age Had scarcely set its signet sage," and so on. I'm sure that quite describes Mr. Frankston. How should you like me for a mamma-in-law, Mrs. Neuchamp? Marahmee is such a dear house, and these yachting parties are all that are wanted to make life perfect.'

'I give my consent,' said Antonia, 'but beware of delay. "Men were deceivers ever," and if you wait more than a fortnight your charms will be on the wane, so I warn you.'

'I like decision,' responded Miss Vavasour, 'but perhaps "two weeks," as our American friend used to say, is *rather hurried* legislation. The trousseau business and the milliner's objections would be fatal. Even

Miranda must have stood out for a longer respite. How long did you take, Miranda, dear? You're the pattern woman, you know, the first girl I ever saw that men and women equally delighted to honour.'

Miranda blushed charmingly, then looking up with her clear, frank eyes, that always appeared to me to be fountains of truth, she replied:

'Hilary and I were married just a month after he asked me to be his wife, you know very well.'

So, jesting lightly, and with a breeze that sufficed just to fill the great sails of the yacht, we glided along until we had explored the recesses of Middle harbour,—a spacious inlet winding amid the thick-growing semi-tropical forest which clothed the slopes of the bays and promontories to the water's edge.

Here and there were small clearings in

which might be discovered a tent or cabin, just sufficient for the needs of a couple of bachelors or a hermit, who here desired to live during his holiday amid this 'boundless contiguity of shade'—'The world forgetting, and the world forgot.'

'Oh, how lovely!' said Mrs. Percival, as we swept round a point and came suddenly upon a fairy-like nook, a tiny bay with milk-white strand and fantastic sandstone rocks. There was a fenced enclosure around a cabin. There was a boat, with rude stone pier and boat-house. The owner, in cool garb and broad-leafed sombrero, was seated on a rock reading, and occasionally dabbling his bare feet in the rippling tide. As the yacht glided past in the deep water which came so close to his possessions, he raised his hat to the ladies, and resumed his studies.

'What a picture of peace and restful

enjoyment!' said Mrs. Craven. 'How I envy men who can seclude themselves like this within an hour's sail from a city! Now, people are so fond of generalising about colonists, and how wrong they are! They always describe them as wildly energetic and restless people, perpetually rushing about in search of gain or gold.'

'That's Thorndale,' said one of the younger guests. 'He works hard enough at his business when he is about it, but his notion of enjoyment is to come here on a Saturday with only a boat-keeper, to fish, and read, and smoke till Monday morning, when he goes back to his law and his office.'

'Sensible fellow!' said the colonel. 'There's nothing like tent life to recruit a man's health after a spell of official work. We used to manage that in India, when we couldn't go all the way to the hills,

by forming small encampments of a dozen or twenty fellows, having a mess-house in common, and living in tents or huts separately when we were not hunting or shooting. Splendid life while it lasted! Sent us back twice the men we were, when we left the lines!'

We anchored for lunch in one of the fairy nooks of which that enchanted region is so lavish. There was tea for the ladies, and something presumably stronger for the seniors. We had mirth and pleasantries, spoken and acted—all went merrily in that charmed sunshine and beneath the shadowy sea-woods. We had songs—'A mellow voice Fitz Eustace had'—that is, one of the young fellows, native and to the manner born, lifted up his tuneful pipe and made us all laugh, the air he sang being certainly not 'wild and sad,'—the reverse, indeed.

'Now, is not this an ideal picnic,—a day

rescued from that terrible fiend Ennui, that haunts us all?' cried Miss Vavasour. 'I might truthfully, perhaps, except myself, who am frivolous, and therefore easily amused—but of course it sounds well to complain and be mysterious. But, really, this is life indeed! The climate makes up for any little deficiency. I shall positively go home and arrange my affairs, make sure of my allowance being paid quarterly, then take a cottage near Miranda, on that sweet North Shore,—isn't that what you call it?—and live happy ever afterwards like a "maid of Llangollen."'

'Nothing can be nicer,' said Mrs. Neuchamp. 'We'll all three live here in the summer, within reach of the sea-breeze. In June you must come up and stay with me at Rainbar; then you will know what the glory of winter in our Riverina is like.'

The breeze freshened as we glided swiftly on our homeward course. We had expended most of the daylight before we left our fairy bower. Sunset banners flared o'er the western horizon. 'White and golden-crimson, blue,' fading imperceptibly into the paler tones, and swift-appearing shades which veil the couch of the day god. The stars tremulously gleamed, at first timidly, then brightly scintillating in pure and clustered radiance. Our merry converse had gradually lessened, then ceased and died away. All seemed impressed by the solemnity of the hour — the hush of sea and land — the shimmering phosphorescent sparkle of the silver-seeming plain over which we swept all swift and silently. Then the lights of the city, brilliant, profuse, widely scattered as in a lower firmament!

Miss Vavasour sat with Miranda's hand in hers. 'How lovely to live in an hour like

this, and yet it is like this with such surroundings that I should like to die.'

'Hush!' said Miranda, 'we must all die when God wills it. It is not good to talk so, my dear.'

. . . . .

During the next week our good friends and fellow-passengers of the *Florentia* were to leave us on their return voyage. We arranged to meet as often as we could manage the leisure, and, as it happened, there was to be a ball at Government House—one of the great functions of the season, which, it was decided, would be an appropriate conclusion to our comradeship. Mr. and Mrs. Neuchamp were going back to their station, Captain Carryall was under sailing orders, and our friends the Colonel and Mrs. Percival were leaving for India and 'going foreign' generally.

Miranda was not eager to attend the

extremely grand, and, as far as she was concerned, strange entertainment. But the whole party were most anxious for her to make her appearance in public—at least on that occasion. Partly from natural curiosity, partly on account of my wishes, and my sisters' and Mrs. Neuchamp's strong persuasion, she consented—pleading, however, to be relieved from all anxiety on the score of her dress.

'Oh, we'll take that responsibility,' said Elinor. 'Antonia Neuchamp is generally admitted to dress in perfect taste. We'll compose a becoming ball-dress amongst us or die—something simple and yet not wholly out of the fashion, and becoming to Miranda's style of beauty.'

'I'm afraid you'll make me vain,' she answered, smiling. 'What will you do if I spend all Hilary's money on dress? However, it must be a lovely sight. I have read

of balls and grand entertainments, of course, and when I was a girl longed to be able to take part in them. Now that I am married,' and here she gazed at me with those tender, truthful eyes, 'I seem not to care for mere pleasure. It leads to nothing, you know.'

'You are going to be a pattern wife, Miranda, I see,' said Mariana, my elder sister. 'You must not spoil Hilary, you know. He will think he is the only man in the world.'

'And is he not for me?' she asked eagerly. Then blushing at the quick betrayal of her inmost heart, she added, 'Should it not be so? Are civilised people in a great city anxious to attract admiration even after they are married?'

'There are people who do this and more in all societies, my dear,' said my mother, with a seriousness which rebuked our inclination to smile at Miranda's ignorance of the world. 'But do you, my dear child, cling

fast to the faith in which you have been reared. You will neither be of them nor among them that follow the multitude to do evil.'

'I don't think there is as much evil in Miranda as would fill a teaspoon,' said Elinor. 'This isle of hers must have been a veritable Eden, or she must have come down from the moon, dear creature. You must be very good to deserve her, I can tell you, Master Hilary.'

. . . . .

The day arrived, the night of which was to realise all manner of rose-coloured visions, in which the youth and maidens of Sydney had for weeks indulged. It was to be the ball of the season. The grand entertainment at which a royal personage, who had arrived in a man-of-war but recently, had consented to be present! The officers of the squadron were, of course, invited. They

were gratified that the ball was fixed for a week previous to their sailing on an extended cruise among the islands. As it happened, too, the great pastoral section—the proprietors of the vast estates of the interior—were still at their clubs and hotels, not yet departed for their annual sojourn amid the limitless wastes of 'The Bush.' The *jeunesse dorée* of the city, the *flaneurs*, and civil servants who, like the poor, are 'always with us,' were specially available. Lastly, the Governor's wife had openly stated that she wished to show her friends the Percivals what we could do in Sydney. And she was not a woman to fail in any of her undertakings.

It was arranged that we should comply with Paul Frankston's imperious mandate, and meet at Marahmee early in the day for the greater convenience of driving thence to Government House, instead of taking steam-

boat from the North Shore. All our plans prospered exceedingly. The day was calm and fair; the night illumined by the soft radiance of the moon. We dined in great peace and contentment, the ladies having devoted—as it appeared to me—the greater portion of the afternoon to the befitting adornments of their persons. We were all in good spirits. I had reason indeed to be so, for that day I had concluded a highly profitable trade arrangement, which augured well for my future mercantile career.

'What a glorious night!' said Paul Frankston. 'Don't be afraid of that Moselle, Ernest, it's some of my own importing — a rare wine, as most judges think. Do you remember the ball we went to, Antonia, given by that fellow Schäfer? Such a swell he looked, and how well he did the thing! He has different quarters now, if all's true that we hear.'

'The poor Count!' answered Mrs. Neuchamp, 'I can't help feeling sorry for him, though he was an impostor. Is it really true that they put him in prison in Batavia? What a fate after such a brilliant career!'

'Carryall was there last year and saw him. Got an order, you know, from the Dutch authorities. Said he was fairly cheerful; expected to be out in three years.'

'He was very near not being imprisoned in Batavia or anywhere else,' interposed Mr. Neuchamp, with some show of asperity. 'If Jack Windsor had come up a little earlier in the fray we'd have broken the scoundrel's neck, or otherwise saved the hangman a task.'

'Now, Ernest, you mustn't bear malice,' said his wife, reprovingly; 'after all, it was Harriet Folleton and not me whom he wished to carry off. It was an afterthought trying to make me accompany her. But

"all's well that ends well." He has paid for his misdeeds in full.'

'Not half as much as he deserves,' growled Neuchamp, who evidently declined to perceive the humorous side of the affair—the attempted abduction of an imprudent beauty and heiress, besides the ultra-felonious taking away of Miss Frankston, as she was then—as a pendant to a career of general swindling and imposture practised upon the good people of Sydney. Mr. Frankston's eyes began to glitter, too, at the reminiscence. So the conversation was changed.

'I really believe that women never wholly repudiate admiration,' continued Mr. Neuchamp reflectively, 'however unprincipled and abandoned the "first robber" may be. It's a curious psychical problem.'

'You know that is untrue, Ernest,' quoth Mrs. Neuchamp, with calm decision. 'Don't

let me hear you say such things.' An hour later our carriages had taken up position in the apparently endless line of vehicles which stretched along Macquarie Street and the lamp-lit avenues which led to it. After nearly an hour's waiting, as it seemed to me, we drove through the lofty freestone gateway which led to the viceregal mansion, and descended within the portico, amid a guard of honour and attendant aides-de-camp. Passing through a vestibule, and being duly divested of wraps in the cloak-rooms, we were finally ushered into the Viceroy's presence, and duly announced.

Paul Frankston took the lead, with Miranda on his arm. I followed with Mrs. Neuchamp, whose husband escorted my sisters. As we were announced by name, I noticed that Colonel and Mrs. Percival, with a few other people of distinction, were standing on the dais, close to the Governor

and Lady Rochester, the latter talking to a young man in naval uniform, whom I conjectured to be the Prince. As we approached, I saw Mrs. Percival speak to Lady Rochester, who at once came forward and greeted us warmly. 'Mr. Frankston,' she said, 'I know the Governor wishes to talk to you about the fortifications; will you and your party come up here and stay with us? And so this is Mrs. Telfer, the heroine of my friend Mrs. Percival's romance? I am delighted to see her, and congratulate you, Mr. Telfer, on bringing us such a sea princess for your bride. She has all the air of it, I declare.'

Miranda secured a seat near Mrs. Percival, who watched with pleasure her evident admiration, mingled with a certain awe, of the brilliant, unaccustomed scene before her. Much to her relief Miss Vavasour came up with the Cravens, and commenced a critical

review of Miranda's and other dresses, which soon obliterated all trace of timidity and strangeness.

'Well, my princess,' began Miss Vavasour, 'and how does this gay and festive scene strike you? Isn't it a fairy tale—a dream of the *Arabian Nights?* Don't you expect to see the fairy godmother come when the clock strikes twelve, and your carriage turn into a pumpkin and white mice?'

'It is a scene of enchantment,' said Miranda. 'I hardly expected anything so dazzlingly beautiful. How the naval uniforms seem to light up the throng, and the soldiers too. I don't wonder at all the pretty things we read about them in books.'

'Yes, they do strike the unaccustomed eye,' said Miss Vavasour. 'I wish I saw them for the first time. I'm afraid I'm growing old. Oh, my coming-out ball! I

didn't sleep for a week before in anticipation of delicious joy, or a week after in retrospection. Ah! me, my youth is slipping away unsatisfied, I much fear. And now, unless my eyes deceive me, we are going to have the first quadrille. Miranda, we must show these good people that we dance in our island. How about partners and a *vis-à-vis?*'

We were not long left in doubt. One of the aides-de-camp, a gorgeous apparition in gold and scarlet, came up bowing, and intimated His Royal Highness's wish to dance with Mrs. Telfer. This, of course, was equivalent to a command. I looked for some indecision or hesitation on the part of Miranda. But it appeared to her evidently just as much a part of the proceedings as if (as had happened before) she had been asked to dance with the captain of a man-of-war at one of their island fêtes, where

waltz, quadrille, and polka had long been familiar. I had provided myself with an enviable partner in the shape of Mrs. Neuchamp; and her husband having promptly arranged matters with Miss Vavasour, we betook ourselves to the next set, where we had a full view of the vice-regal party. My sisters had apparently no difficulty in deciding between several aspirants for their respective hands, as they and their partners helped to make up the set.

When the melodious crash broke forth in commencement from Herr Königsmark's musicians, recruited from an Austrian military band which had visited Australia, a murmur of admiration made itself audible, as the Prince and his partner stepped forth in the opening measure of the dance. I turned my head and was lost in astonishment as I noticed the unconscious grace with which

Miranda moved—calm as when rivalling the fairies in rhythmic measure on a milk-white beach beside the moonlit wave. How many a time had I watched her!

'Who in the world is that lovely creature dancing with the Prince?' I heard a middle-aged dame behind me ask. 'She has a foreign appearance, and I think she is the most exquisitely beautiful woman I ever saw in my life. What a figure, too! How she smiles, what teeth, what eyes! Is there any news of a migration of angels? Such strange things happen nowadays on account of electricity and all that. Who and what is she, Mary Kingston, again I ask you?'

'My dear Arabella,' answered the other dame, evidently one of the aristocracy of the land, 'you are so enthusiastic! She came with the Frankston party. That's her husband quite close to us, dancing with Mrs. Neuchamp. He's the son of Captain Telfer

of North Shore, and has been away among the islands and nobody knows where for ever so long. He married her at Norfolk Island. I believe she is one of those wonderful Pitcairn people that we hear such good accounts of.'

'H'm; he's a young man of distinctly good taste, I must say. I wish my Cavendish had gone to the islands too, if that is the sort of girl they grow there. Mrs. Percival seems to be a great chum of hers. How did that come about?'

'I believe they came back in the *Florentia* together. Captain Carryall touched at Norfolk Island on the way from Honolulu, and it seems that Mrs. Percival's little boy fell overboard on the voyage, and the girl was into the sea after him like a shot, and swam with him in her arms till the boats came. There was something about a shark too. Mrs. Percival tells

everybody she saved his life. No wonder she raves about her.'

'What a pearl of a girl! No wonder, indeed! And to think of her having a world of courage and fire in her with all that delicacy and beauty. I can't take my eyes off her. The Prince admires her, apparently, too; and she smiles like a pleased child, with as little thought of vanity or harm, I dare swear, as a baby. She ought to be a princess, no doubt of it. So I see it's the last figure. I must go and look up my old friend, Paul Frankston, and make her tell me all about her.'

After the dance and the usual promenade, Mrs. Neuchamp and I recovered our respective spouses, and took the opportunity to make a detour of the ball-room, and even to go through the next apartment, where refreshments were procurable, into the ample gardens. The night was superbly beautiful. The full moon lit up the grove of tropical

foliage and richly-flowering plants, the glades carpeted with velvet lawn, the wide sea-plain traversed by shimmering pathways of silver. Below, in the sleeping bay, lay several men-of-war, half in shadow, half illuminated with coloured lamps hanging from their rigging. Gay and mirthful, grave or earnest, the frequent partners passed to and fro like shadows of revellers beneath the moon, or turned to the lower paths to gaze at the motionless vessels, the silver sea, the whispering wave. It was an ecstatic experience, a fairy pageant, a supernal revelation of an enchanted landscape.

Miranda pressed my arm. 'Oh, Hilary, how lovely all this is! But you must not laugh at me. Now that I have seen it, I do not think I shall be anxious to follow it up. There is something almost intoxicating about it all. I can imagine it unfitting people for their everyday life.'

We had hardly returned to the ball-room when the glorious strains of the 'Tausend und einer nacht' waltz pealed forth from the band, and hurrying and anxious swains in search of their partners, not always easy to discover in such a crush, were seen in every direction. Instant request was preferred to Miranda by a naval officer high in command, but to my surprise, as we had not spoken on the subject, she graciously, but firmly, declined the honour. He protested, but she quietly repeated her negative: 'I only dance round dances with my husband, Captain Harley! and, indeed, these not very often.'

He was inclined to be persistent, though most courteous. 'I am sure you used to dance them once. Indeed, I heard such an account of your waltzing, Mrs. Telfer.'

'That was before I was married, Captain Harley!' she replied, with such evident belief that this explanation fully answered

every objection that neither the captain nor I could help smiling.

'Look at your friend, Mrs. Neuchamp,' he said, as that dainty matron came gliding past with a military partner, looking like the very impersonation of the waltz, 'and Mrs. Craven, and Mrs. Percival.'

'I am so sorry that I can't comply,' she answered. 'They are quite right to dance waltzes if they please. I do not care for them now, and am only going to have one with Hilary to-night. He is fond of it, I know. I will dance the Lancers with you, if you like.'

'Anything with *you*,' murmured the captain gallantly, as he carefully wrote her name on his card, and departed to secure a partner for the yet unfinished portion of the dance.

'I see by this lovely programme,' she said, 'that there is another waltz, a polka,

and then the Lancers, which I used to know very well; and after that I will dance the next waltz with you, Hilary, just to feel what this wonderful floor is like. You are not angry with me for refusing Captain Harley? I really feel as if I *could* not do it.'

'You can follow your own way, my dear,' I said, 'in this and all minor matters. It concerns you chiefly; and, considering how many husbands think their wives are rather too fond of dancing, I shall certainly not quarrel with mine for not caring for it enough.'

I was not altogether without interest as to this set of Lancers which she had promised to the gallant captain of the *Arethusa*, knowing as I did that the fashion had changed considerably since the Lancers was a decorous, somewhat dull dance, differing from the quadrille only in a more complicated series of evolutions, and, like

that very proper performance, affording much opportunity for conversation. Not intending to take part in it myself, and being, indeed, more than sufficiently entertained as a spectator of the novel spectacle, I stationed myself near the 'tops,' one couple of which Miranda's partner elected to be. I saw by the composition of the set, and the looks of some of the youths and maidens who eagerly took their places with their prearranged *vis-à-vis*, that the pace would be rapid and the newest variations introduced.

I provided, therefore, for a *contretemps*. My younger sister, having professed herself tired with the previous waltz, had declined the invitation of a partner not wholly acceptable as it appeared to me. I therefore persuaded her to walk up with me to a seat near Miranda, so that we, as I explained, might see how she got on.

What I anticipated exactly came to pass. The first few non-committal quadrille steps were got through without unusual display, but when Miranda saw the damsel next to her leaning back as far as she could manage, while her partner swung her round several times, as if he either wished to lift her entirely off her feet, or drag her arms out of the sockets, a look of amazement overspread her features. She stopped with a startled air, commingled with distaste, and saying to her surprised partner, 'I cannot dance like this—I did not know—why did no one tell me?' —walked like a queen to the nearest seat. Now my foresight came in. Knowing that a girl of nineteen would be willing to dance with a naval officer of the rank and fashion of Captain Harley, if she was ready to drop with fatigue, I said promptly, 'Allow me to introduce you to my sister, Captain Harley, who will, I am sure, be happy to take my

wife's place.' A look of joyful acquiescence lit up her countenance, and before any serious hitch took place in the figure the vacancy was filled.

I fancied that my sister Elinor, who was at the age when girls are not disinclined for a little daring frolic out of pure gladsomeness, performed her part in the figures with somewhat less unreserve after noticing the look of quiet surprise with which Miranda observed some of the more vivacious couples.

We contented ourselves, when the next series of waltzes commenced, with a single dance, which we enjoyed as thoroughly as the perfection of floor, music, and surroundings warranted.

'Oh, what a floor!' said Miranda; 'if I were as fond of dancing as I used to be, I could dance all night; and such music! Quite heavenly, if it is not wicked to say so. And there is the sea, too, with the moonlight

on it as in old days! We have been taken to an enchanted castle!

'But there is something different. I can hardly describe my feelings. Why, I cannot explain, but going back to dancing now for the mere pleasure of it, when I have entered upon the serious duties of life, appears like returning to one's childish passion for dolls and playthings.'

'And yet, how many married people of both sexes are dancing now, not with each other either.'

'I see them, and I wonder. I am not surprised at married men dancing—if they like it. If they come at all, they may as well do so as sit down and get weary. But I think the married women should leave the round dances to the girls.'

'Would not balls be rather slow if the married women only danced squares?'

'I don't see why. Yet many of the girls

have no partners—wall-flowers, I think you call them. And that is hardly fair, surely.'

As this dance only came before supper, which was now near at hand, we danced it out. I hardly noticed until the music closed how many of the other couples had stopped, or that quite a crowd had collected around us. This was a tribute, I found, to Miranda's performance, which had an ease and grace of movement such as I never saw any living woman possess. She hardly seemed to use the ordinary means of progression. Hers was a half-aerial motion, in time to every note and movement of the music, while the rhythmic sway and yielding grace of her figure presented the idea of a mermaiden floating through the translucent waves rather than that of a mortal woman.

As she swayed dreamily to the wondrous music of 'Tausend und einer nacht,' her head thrown slightly back, her parted lips,

her wondrous eyes, her faultless form so impressed the bystanders with the ideal of supreme beauty, that they scarce repressed an audible murmur as the music ceased and the dance came to an end.

When supper was announced there was the usual crush, but before the doors were opened a few of the more favoured guests, including the Frankstons and ourselves, were conducted by one of the aides-de-camp to a place near the viceregal party. Miranda was taken possession of by another of our naval friends, who seemed to think that they had special claims upon her, as having knowledge of her island home. I was requested to take in our good friend and fellow-voyager Mrs. Percival, who was more warm and effusive in praise of Miranda than I ever thought possible before her child's danger broke through the crust of her ordinary manner. Now nothing could

have been more sisterly and unreserved than her tone and expression.

'It has been quite a luxury to all of us to look on at that wonderful darling of a wife of yours dancing! The whole room, including Lady Rochester, was in ecstasies, I assure you. You came in for your share of compliments also, which I mustn't make you vain by repeating. How exquisitely, how charmingly she does dance! I have seen some of the best *danseuses* in Europe and India—on and off the stage—and not one worthy to be named with her. She is a dream of grace—the very poetry of motion. I said so before to-night, and now every one agrees with me. It is rather a disappointment in some quarters that she declines to dance except with you. It would seem odd for some people, but being the woman she is I understand it.'

'She is free to follow her own course

socially,' I said. 'She will soon decide upon her line of action, and will not be turned from it by outside influence. Fortunately she and my mother are much in harmony as to leading principles, which relieves my mind considerably.'

'You are fortunate in that, then, as in several other respects; may I add that I think you worthy of your good fortune. I trust that my boy's simple prayers for your welfare—and he prays for you both every night—may be answered.'

Just before the conclusion of the supper I saw that Miranda had been presented to his Excellency the Governor, who was standing near the Prince. Both of these personages were most complimentary and flattering in their attention to her, and when we left, as we had arranged, immediately after that most important function supper, leaving the girls to go home with Mr. and

Mrs. Neuchamp, we were gratified to think that we could not have been more graciously received—treated even with distinction—and that nothing had occurred to detract in the slightest degree from the unwonted pleasure and modest triumph of the night.

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After this, our first experience of 'society,' in the higher sense of the word, unexpectedly agreeable as it had been, Miranda's fixed resolve, in which I fully concurred, was to detach ourselves from it and its code of obligations, except at rare intervals—to live our own lives, and to trouble ourselves as little as might be with the tastes and fancies of others.

I was likely to have my time fully occupied in the development of my business. Miranda had, partly from observation, partly from information supplied by my mother and sisters, discovered that there was even in

prosperous, easy-going, naturally-favoured Sydney a section of ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-taught poor. 'While I meet them daily, such as I never saw on our island, I cannot occupy myself with the vanities of life.' My mother was delighted to find a daughter willing to co-operate with her in the benevolent plans of relief which she was always organising for the poor and the afflicted. Between them a notable increase of efficiency took place in the management of children's hospitals, soup-kitchens, and other institutions, commonly regarded with indifference, if not dislike, by the well-to-do members of society. Outside of these duties, our chief pleasure at the end of the week, when only we could afford the time, was a cruise in our sailing-boat the *Harpooner*, which soon came to be known as one of the fastest in the harbour, as well as one that was rarely absent from the Satur-

day's regatta, when a stiff breeze was sending the spray aloft.

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Our life henceforth was that of the happy nations 'that have no history.' My business prospered, and as it largely increased and developed from its original proportions, Captain Carryall began to tire of his voyages and settled down on shore.

Within a year of the founding of our commercial enterprise one of the ideal houses we had so often pictured came into our possession. In an afternoon stroll, Miranda and I had ventured into a deserted garden, lured by the masses of crimson blooms on a great double hibiscus. The heavy entrance-gate was awry—the stone pillars decaying—the avenue weed-grown and neglected—the shrubberies trodden down and disfigured by browsing cattle. Exploring farther behind a screen

of thick-growing pines, we found the house, —a noble, wide-balconied freestone building, which I well remembered in my boyhood. Then it was inhabited, carefully tended, and ringing with the voices of happy boys and girls in holiday-time. What blight had fallen on the place, or on the pleasant family that once dwelt there? On the north-eastern side the land sloped down to a little bay, sheltered from the prevailing wind, and provided with pier and boat-house—all marine conveniences, in short. 'Oh, if we had a house like this,' said Miranda, clapping her hands, 'how happy we should be! Not that I am otherwise now; but I should enjoy having this for our own. We could soon renovate the poor garden.' I assented, but said nothing at the time—resolved to take counsel of our good friend and trusted adviser then and now—who else but Paul Frankston?

From him I learned the history of the house and its old-time inmates. Some were dead and some were gone. The story was long. The gist of it was, however, that it was now in the hands of certain trustees for the benefit of the heirs-at-law. 'I think I can find out about it,' he concluded. 'And now come down and look at my little boat. I've had some painting and gilding done lately; I want you all—father, mother, sisters, wife, and everybody—to come for a sail next Saturday. I'm going to have a race with Richard Jones to the Heads and back, and I want your wife to steer. Then we'll win, I'm sure, and we'll call in at Edenhall—that's the name of the old place you saw—been its name for fifty years or more—and we'll have another look at it.'

I said 'Yes, by all means.'

The next Saturday proved to be a day

specially provided by the gods for boat-sailing. The wind was in the right quarter, the weather fine. The *Sea-gull* swept across the harbour like a veritable sea-bird, spreading her broad wings. The whole party had punctually assembled at our jetty after an early lunch. The breeze freshened as the day wore on; we had our friendly race against an old comrade of Mr. Frankston's—like him, not all ignorant of the ways of those who go down to the deep in ships—which we won handsomely, thanks to Miranda's steering, as Paul loudly averred. And that young woman herself, as the *Sea-gull* went flying past her sister yacht in the concluding tack, lying down 'gunnel under,' with every inch of canvas on that she dared carry, was as eager and excited as if she had been paddling for her life in one of the canoe races of her childhood.

We got back to Neutral Bay in time

for afternoon tea, a little later than the established hour. But instead of having it on board, Paul proposed to have it at Eden-hall, where he said he had permission to go whenever he pleased. He had arranged with the caretaker too.

We landed at the long-unused pier. 'How many times have I been here before, in poor old Dartmoor's time,' said Mr. Frankston, 'and how many a jolly night have I spent within those old walls! Well, well! time goes on, and our friends, where are they? Life's a sad business at best. However, we can't make it better by crying over our losses. Ladies and gentlemen, follow me!'

With a sudden change of tone and manner, Paul stepped briskly along the upward-winding path, long unused, which led to the house. The hall door stood open, and passing along a noble hall and

turning to the right, we entered a dining-room of fine proportions. In this was an improvised table on trestles whereon was spread a tempting collation. Two men-servants, whom I recognised as the Marahmee butler and footman, stood ready to serve the company. A needful amount of sweeping and repair had been effected. The windows had been cleaned, and a fine view of the bay thereby afforded. Altogether the effect was as striking as it was unexpected; a general exclamation broke from the company.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Paul, 'I have prepared a surprise for you, I know; but oblige me by making yourselves at home for the present, and dining with me in this informal fashion — I will explain by and by.'

The day was nearly spent. It would probably be near the time of twilight, which

in summer in Australia is nearer nine o'clock than eight, before we reached our homes. So the majority of the guests hailed the idea as one of Paul's eccentric notions with which he was wont to amuse his intimates. The Marahmee champagne was proverbial, and after a reasonable number of corks had been drawn, a progressive degree of cheerfulness was reached. Paul rose to his feet, and requested the usual solemnities to be observed, as he was about to propose a toast. 'Those of my friends who have been here before, in its happier times, will remember the former owner of this once pleasant home. Little is left now save the evidences of decay and desertion—the memories of a long-past happy day. But there is no reason why it should not be again inhabited, again be filled with pleasant and pleasure-giving inhabitants. It is solid and substantial; if somewhat old-

fashioned, all the better I say. There was no jerry building in the old days. The garden is here—to be easily renewed in beauty—the jetty, and the boat-house. The sea is here, much as I remember when as a boy I used to get "congewoi" for bait off those very rocks.'

'Hear hear!' from the guests, and Mr. Richard Jones.

'And now I come to a piece of news which I am sure you will hear with pleasure. The house and grounds have been purchased by a young friend of mine, whose health, with that of his charming wife, I now ask you to drink with all the honours. The health of Mr. and Mrs. Telfer, their long life and prosperity! and may we all have many as pleasant a sail round the harbour as we have had to-day, and come here to enjoy ourselves at the end of it.'

The applause which followed was tumul-

tuous. Paul had sprung a surprise upon his guests with a vengeance. I was as much astonished as anybody; for though I knew that he had promised to make inquiries about the price put upon the property, I had no idea that he would go further in the matter, still less that he would purchase it on my account, as it was evident that he had done.

I said a few words, chiefly to the effect that it seemed to me quite unnecessary to go through the form of exerting myself for my advancement in life, as my friends, Mr. Frankston and Captain Carryall, were bent on making my fortune for me. I trusted to prove not wholly unworthy of such unselfish friendship, and thanking them all in the name of my wife and myself, trusted that a meeting like this would often conclude a happy day such as we had just completed. As for Miranda, she went up

to the old man, and placing her hand in his, looked up into his face with an expression of heartfelt gratitude, which hardly needed the addition of her words: 'You have made us both perfectly happy —what can I say? My heart will not let me speak. We have nothing to wish for now in this world.'

The old man looked at her with an expression of mingled admiration and paternal affection. 'I have two daughters now,' he said, 'and two sons; I was always wishing to have another pair, to gossip with when Antonia and Ernest were away. Now I have found them, I am sure. The only thing we want now is another boat.'

Miranda's eyes glistened at the allusion, and she looked as if she was only prevented, by a half-instinctive doubt as to the fitness of the occasion, from embracing Paul before the assembled company.

. . . . .

Years have passed since that day. Children's voices have long since echoed in the wide verandahs and amid the shrubberies of Edenhall. The house, thoroughly renovated, is one of the most comfortable, if not the most aristocratic, of the many embowered mansions which look over the Haven Beauteous.

My boys have been 'water babies' from earliest childhood, and we can turn out a crew not easy to beat, particularly when their mother can be persuaded to steer. My girls have inherited a large proportion of their mother's fearless spirit, though people say not one has equalled her in beauty. Their partners in the dance, however, appear to consider them sufficiently good-looking, if one may judge by the competition which their appearance at balls usually produces.

Our business, always aided by the cool

heads and steady courage of the senior partners, has increased, with the growth of the city of Sydney and the development of the island trade, beyond all hope and expectation. I am a rich man now, and, indeed, somewhat in danger of the occasional mood of discontent with the uneventful, unvarying tide of success upon which life's bark appears ever to float. But one look at Miranda's face, serenely happy in her children, in her daily life of charity and almsgiving, in the devoted love and trust of my parents, is all-sufficient to banish all vagrant ideas.

Sometimes, in the train of unbidden fancies which throng the portals of the mind, the scenes and sounds of a far clime claim right of audience. Again I see the paradisal woodland, the mysterious mountain forest, the ceaseless moan of the billow upon the reef sounds in my ear; while forms, now fair, now fierce, flit, shadow-like, across the scene.

I hear again the soft voices of the island girls as in frolic race they troop to beach or stream. I see the sad, bright eyes of Lālia, or mark the fierce regard of Hope Island Nellie as she stands with bared bosom full in the track of the deadly arrow flight. I hear the lion roar of Hayston as he quells a mutiny, or towers, alone and unarmed, above a crowd of hostile islanders. I shudder in thought at the dangers which I have escaped. Once more sounds from afar the weird voice of the tempest in the midnight wreck of the *Leonora.* Lastly, the harbour lights disappear as I sit in my cane lounge in the verandah of Edenhall, and in place of the wooded heights and distant city I see the breakers upon the reef of Ocean Island, and discern a solitary figure in the stern of a small boat sailing out into the illimitable gloom; I fall a-musing upon the mysterious problems of Fate — of man's life and the

strange procession of circumstance — until the hour strikes and I retire. Yet my thoughts are still dominated by the majestic figure of the Captain, grand in his natural good qualities, grand in his fearless courage, his generosity, his friendship—grand even in his vices. He was not without resemblance to a yet more famous corsair, immortalised by the poet—

> Who died and left a name to other times,
> Link'd with one virtue and a thousand crimes.

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